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**“Great Writers.”**

**LIFE AND WRITINGS OF  
ALFRED LORD TENNYSON**



Life and Writings  
of  
Alfred  
Lord Tennyson

BY  
ARTHUR TURNBULL

London and Felling-on-Cyne:  
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## NOTE.

THIS Life of Lord Tennyson is indebted to the *Memoir* by Hallam, Lord Tennyson, published in 1897, and *Tennyson and his Friends*, also by Hallam, Lord Tennyson, for the facts of the career of the poet. Other Lives of Lord Tennyson have been consulted, principally those by Mr. Arthur Waugh, 1892, by Mr. Andrew Lang, 1901, by Mr. A. C. Benson, and *Tennyson* ("Temple" Primers), by Mr. Morton Luce. *The Early Poems of Alfred, Lord Tennyson* and *In Memoriam, The Princess, and Maud*, edited by Professor Churton Collins, and numerous critical articles in the leading magazines, have been brought into requisition in writing the volume.



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# LIFE AND WRITINGS OF ALFRED LORD TENNYSON.

## CHAPTER I.

### EARLY YEARS.

AMONG our poets Alfred Lord Tennyson occupies a conspicuous place. From 1842 to 1892 he was the most well-known poet of England, and he had not, like many a poet, to wait till near the end of his life to receive his just reward of fame; for, from his thirty-third year onward, he continued to hold the position of representative poet of his country in the same way as Verdi was the representative master of music in Italy during the same period.<sup>1</sup> The Laureateship bestowed upon him in 1850 was only the public recognition of the dominion he had already acquired among his countrymen. Such a career is a phenomenon in our literary history worthy of being considered from time to time, because the further Tennyson recedes from us the reasons of his supremacy will become more apparent. A man who thus overshadowed his own age must have been not only the voice of some of the potent ideas

and feelings of his own epoch; he must also be one of those who are shaping the time to come, for civilization, progress, is made up by the great Idealists who give to the multitude what the multitude crave for and desire to listen to. To re-assess our indebtedness to Tennyson requires that his Life should be written, in order that we may contemplate the growth of his poetic gift in all its completeness.

Alfred Tennyson was born at Somersby on the 6th of August 1809. The Tennysons can trace their ancestry to the fourteenth century. His great-grandfather was a Michael Tennyson, of Lincoln; his grandfather George Tennyson, of Bayons Manor, M.P., whose son was the Rev. George Clayton Tennyson, M.A., LL.D., Rector of Somersby (born 1778), who married Elizabeth Fytche (born 1781). They had twelve children—George (who died in infancy), Frederick, Charles, Alfred, Mary, Emilia, Edward, Arthur, Septimus, Matilda, Cecilia, Horatio. Alfred was thus the fourth son. "Half-way between Horncastle and Spilsby," says the *Memoir*, "in a land of quiet villages, large fields, grey hillsides, and noble, tall-towered churches, on the lower slope of a Lincolnshire wold, the pastoral hamlet of Somersby nestles, embosomed in trees." (*Mem.* i. pp. 1-2.)

The Rectory was one of those romantic places with woodbine climbing round its windows, and a high Gothic dining-room with stained-glass windows, and a smooth-shaven lawn in front, surrounded by hollyhocks and sunflowers, which make up a picture of home comfort often met with in English villages. To the south was a steep banked brook, which

Tennyson afterwards celebrated in his poetry.<sup>1</sup> The autumnal aspect of the garden has also been made immortal in a lyric of rare beauty beginning "A spirit haunts the year's last hours."

" The air is damp, and hush'd, and close,  
As a sick man's room when he taketh repose  
An hour before death ;  
My very heart faints and my whole soul grieves  
At the moist rich smell of the rotting leaves,  
And the breath  
Of the fading edges of box beneath,  
And the year's last rose.  
Heavily hangs the broad sunflower  
Over its grave i' the air so chilly ;  
Heavily hangs the hollyhock,  
Heavily hangs the tiger-lily."

The home life of the young Tennysons seems to have been of the most happy kind: we have not much recorded of the wonders of the childhood of the poet, for although all children are wonderful to parents, the Tennysons were not given to babble over much of the precocities of their offspring. They had their amusements, however, such as all children have; their games of playing at authorship in the shape of writing tales and putting them under each

# 1 ODE TO MEMORY.

the brook that loves  
To purl o'er matted cress and ribbed sand,  
Or dimple in the dusk of rushy coves,  
Drawing into his narrow earthen urn,  
In every elbow and turn,  
The filter'd tribute of the rough woodland.

other's plates at dinner, to be read aloud when dinner was over. And Alfred was a story-teller, and loved to sit in the firelight on winter evenings, with his brothers and sisters around him, recounting stories of "knights and heroes among untravelled forests rescuing distressed damsels, or on gigantic mountains fighting dragons." (*Mem.* i. p. 5.) They likewise played at being actors.

In his seventh year Tennyson was sent to school at Louth. His mother had been born in this town, being daughter of the Vicar, the Rev. Stephen Fytche. The master of the Grammar School was the Rev. J. Waite, a tempestuous, flogging teacher of the old stamp of schoolmasters. Here Tennyson remained for about four years, having been grounded in Latin at least, if he did not get a first-class elementary training. He returned to Somersby in 1820, when his education was superintended by his father. The Rev. George Tennyson was a Hebrew and Syriac scholar, and he made himself proficient in Greek, in order that he might teach his sons. All that they acquired of languages, of the fine arts, of mathematics, and natural science, until they were sent to Cambridge, was learned of the father. He drummed Horace into them, with the natural result that Tennyson, like Byron before him, detested the worthy old Roman for life. (*Mem.* i. p. 16.) "

The library at Somersby Rectory was a good one, including all the leading poets and prose writers—Shakespeare, Milton, Burke, Goldsmith, Rabelais, Sir William Jones, Addison, Swift, Defoe, Cervantes, Bunyan, and Buffon. The family was a literary one,

and several of the brothers wrote poetry beside Alfred. "According to the best of my recollection," says Tennyson, "when I was about eight years old, I covered two sides of a slate with Thomsonian blank verse in praise of flowers for my brother Charles, who was a year older than I was, Thomson being then the only poet I knew. Before I could read I was in the habit on a stormy day of spreading my arms to the wind and crying out, 'I hear a voice that's speaking in the wind,' and the words 'far, far away' had always a strange charm for me. About ten or eleven Pope's *Homer's Iliad* became a favourite of mine, and I wrote hundreds and hundreds of lines in the regular Popean metre, nay, even could improvise them, so could my two elder brothers, for my father was a poet, and could write regular metre very skilfully." (*Mem.* i. p. 11.)

About this time, too, his twelfth year, we have specimens of Tennyson's early letters. One, to his aunt Marianne, giving his views on Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, in which he points out the beauty of Milton's Latinism in the employment of the word *diffused* in the line

"See how he lies at random, carefully *diffused*,"

and also the reason—to avoid alliteration—why Milton says "the Gates of Azzar" for "the Gates of Gaza." Already at this early age Tennyson was a fine-phrase monger. He had begun to see that poetry had a vocabulary of its own, and employs words which would be affectation in prose. (*Mem.* i. p. 9.) Another letter written to the governess of his

sisters indicates that he had already a sense of that delicate fun which he afterwards employed only very rarely—in *Amphion* and *The Princess*—born of Cervantes. He addresses his letter from "La Mancha" to his "Dear Dulcinea," and signs it "Don Quixote." In this letter he shows he was acquainted with Gray, Ossian, Milman, Moore, Crabbe, and Coleridge among the English poets. (*Mem.* i. p. 10.) During his twelfth and perhaps thirteenth year, too, young Tennyson wrote an epic of six thousand lines after the manner of Sir Walter Scott, "full of battles, dealing, too, with sea and mountain scenery, with Scott's regularity of octosyllabics, and his occasional varieties" (*Mem.* i. p. 12); and a drama in blank verse. In this respect he does not differ from many other young men gifted with the knack of rhyming and verse-making. Nothing seems impossible to youth, and to write a tragedy, one of the highest forms of literary art, and requiring experience of life, is always the aspiration of the young budding poet. Wordsworth, too, commenced that way, and afterwards published it. Tennyson wisely kept his.

Tennyson's father at this time said of his son, "If Alfred die, one of our greatest poets will have gone"; and at another time, "I should not wonder if Alfred were to revive the greatness of his relative, William Pitt" (*Mem.* i. p. 12); and other friends and acquaintances echoed such sentiments. From the specimens of Tennyson's early poetry given in the *Memoir*, however, and the first volume published in 1827, such eulogiums and expectations must be char-

acterized rather as the expression of the partiality of relatives than the sound of true discernment. As we shall afterwards see, Tennyson's earliest poetry has nothing very original in it, but is only the echo of the poets of his own time. Many a young lad with a gift for rhyming has written as good, if not better, verses than Tennyson did in his teens, and has had the indulgent veto of his little circle as the coming great poet, and who afterwards, abandoning verse, would be ashamed of the flatteries of his coterie, which, had they been realized, would have been recalled and printed, but, not realized, they were forgotten. We need not lay too much stress upon such prognostications; they appear in nearly all the biographies of the great poets.

The scenery round about Somersby is the flat country of the fens, and it is Tennyson who has introduced its beauties and features into English poetry. Through him its peculiarities have been made familiar in the same way as the peculiarities of the Lake District have been popularized by Wordsworth. Its richly grassed fields, its old waterways and moated farms have a charm about them of their own. Tennyson likened the immense sweep of country with its frequent bridges spanning the waterways to Infinity. The Tennysons did not confine themselves to this home district. Fourteen miles distant was Mablethorpe on the seaside, where they loved to go and get a glimpse of that other emblem of infinity, the sea; and it was here that Tennyson derived some of his most characteristic imagery. He was fascinated during his boyhood by



the seaside sights of the long ocean rollers advancing to the shore, breaking into white, and spreading over the flat sands; the heavy banks of sand dunes with the seagulls weaving their flights around, and the distant boom of the waves on the rocks at night, while Orion and the moon rose glittering in the front of night, drawing the mind away into the immensities. These frequent visits to the seaside, with a difference of scenery from that of Somersby and its vicinity, were like a dip into a land of mystery and imagination, and Tennyson always treasured them up in remembrance, and they have afforded him material for some of his finest similes.

The family of the Tennysons was a happy one; they were of a highly cultured kind, and took an interest in most of the things called the "march of mind." Tennyson's father, of course, must have had a heavy responsibility in bringing up his twelve children, and must occasionally have had to act the stern monitor, as well as the guide, philosopher, and friend of his sons; and we have a glimpse of him in that capacity in the following culling from the *Memoirs*, which is so good it cannot be omitted. It is by Arthur, the sixth son of the family. He says:—"A scene comes before me of Frederick, Charles, and Alfred having a regular scrimmage with lesson-books, and of my father suddenly coming round the corner. I didn't wait to see what happened, but bolted: our father's tall form appearing was generally at such moments the signal for a regular 'scatter,' but, although very severe, he had great tenderness of heart. I can well recollect him by my

bedside, almost weeping, when I had a bad paroxysm of croup. Alfred had the same tenderness in spite of his somewhat gruff manner; he was notable among his brothers for strength and independence of character. His was a very gentle nature, and I never remember quarrelling with him. He was very kind to us who were younger than he was, and I remember his tremendous excitement when he got hold of Bewick for the first time: how he paced up and down the lawn for hours studying him, and how he kept rushing in to us in the schoolroom to show us some of the marvellous woodcuts, and to let us have a share in this new pleasure of his. Indeed he was always a great reader, and if he went alone he would take his book with him on his walk. One day in the winter, the snow being deep, he did not hear the Louth mail coming up behind. Suddenly 'Ho! ho!' from the coachman roused him. He looked up and found a horse's nose and eyes over his shoulder as if reading his book. Like my father, Alfred had a great head, so that when I put on his hat it came down over my face. He, too, like my father, had a powerful frame, a splendid physique, and we used to have gymnastics over the large beam in his attic den, which was in the gable looking westward. Alfred and I often took long rambles together, and on one particular afternoon, when we were in the home fields talking of our respective futures, he said emphatically, 'Well, Arthur, I mean to be famous.' (From his earliest years he felt that he was a poet, and earnestly trained himself to be worthy of his vocation.) For our less active amusements we

carved in wood and moulded with clay, and one of my earliest recollections of Alfred is watching him form with clay a Gothic archway in the bole of an old tree." (*Mem.* pp. 16-17.)

In 1827 Tennyson and his brother Frederick published a joint volume of poetry called *Poems by Two Brothers*, their first venture in literature. They received £20 for it from Jackson, a bookseller of Louth, one of the conditions being, however, that they should take half of the money in books, a most remarkable transaction for two youths of nineteen and seventeen. Charles also contributed to the volume, so that the title of the book is misleading. The little volume contains the following:—1, *Memory*; 2, *The Exile's Harp*; 3, "Why should we weep for those who die"; 4, *Remorse*; 5, *The Dell of E—*; 6, *Antony to Cleopatra*; 7, "I wander in Darkness and Sorrow"; 8, *The Old Sword*; 9, "We meet no more"; 10, *Written by an Exile of Bassorah while sailing down the Euphrates*; 11, *The Vale of Bones*; 12, "Did not thy roseate lips outvie"; 13, *Persia*; 14, *Egypt*; 15, *The Druid's Prophecies*; 16, *The Expedition of Nadir Shah into Hindostan*; 17, *The Maid of Savoy*; 18, *Midnight*; 19, *Scotch Song* (?); 20, *Song*, "It is solemn eventime"; 21, *Friendship*; 22, "And ask ye why these sad tears stream"; 23, *On Sublimity*; 24, *The Deity*; 25, *Time, an Ode*; 26, *God's Denunciations against Pharaoh-Hophra, or Apries*; 27, *The Grave of a Suicide*; 28, *The Wulk at Midnight*; 29, *Mithridates Presenting Berenice with the Cup of Poison*; 30, *The Old Chieftain*; 31, *The Fall of Jerusalem*; 32,

*Lamentation of the Peruvians*; 33, "The sun goes down in the dark blue main"; 34, *On a Dead Enemy*; 35, *The Duke of Alva's Observation on Kings*; 36, "Ah! yes, the lip may faintly smile"; 37, "Thou camest to thy bower, my love, across the musky grove"; 38, *The Passions*; 39, *The High Priest to Alexander*; 40, *On the Moonlight Shining upon a Friend's Grave*; 41, *A Contrast*; 42, *The Dying Christian*; 43, "Oh, ye wild winds that roar and rave"; 44, *Switzerland*; 45, *Babylon*; 46, *Love*; 47, *Song*, "To sit beside a crystal spring"; 48, *Exhortation to the Greeks*; 49, *King Charles's Vision*. Alfred Tennyson's share in the volume consists of these forty-nine pieces. They are mostly imitative of Ossian, Scott, and of Byron's Hebrew melodies, and some others which cannot be said to have been suggested by any particular well-known poet, but are such verses as are found in all young poets bewailing the sadness of life and looking back to their boyhood as the Golden Age, now gone, never to return. In *Memory*, p. 6, for instance, *Memory* is hailed as—

"Memory! dear enchanter,  
 Why bring back to view  
 Dreams of youth, which banter  
 All that e'er was true?  
 Why present before me  
 Thoughts of years gone by,  
 Which, like shadows o'er me,  
 Dim in distance fly?  
 Days of youth, now shaded  
 By twilight of long years,  
 Flowers of youth, now faded,  
 Though bathed in sorrow's tears?"

Thoughts of youth which waken  
Mournful feelings now,  
Fruits which Time hath shaken  
From off their parent bough.”

This plaintive melancholy is incidental to all young poets.

*The Exile's Harp*, p. 13, is a reminiscence of Scott's "Harp of the North" in *The Lady of the Lake*. "Why should we weep for those who die?" is the young poet's declaration of his faith in Immortality. *Remorse*, p. 20, deals with eternal punishment. *The Dell of E—*, p. 26, though not written in the Spenserian stanza, savours of Spenser. "Y-clad," "clomb," "coverture of boughs" are old English phrases; "cloud-capt," "heaven-invading," "earth-embedded" are specimens of those doubler epithets of which Tennyson was so fond, derived from classical sources. *Antony to Cleopatra*, p. 31, and *Mithridates Presenting Berenice with the Cup of Poison*, p. 136, the two best poems in the volume, are also classical. *The Vale of Bones*, p. 47, contains some striking verse in the style of Scott, which Tennyson afterwards recalled in his ballad of *Oriana*. In *Persia*, p. 63, Persia is hailed as the Land of the Lotus, a plant which was always a favourite of Tennyson. In *Egypt*, p. 67, the Pyramids are introduced as the type of the sublime, withstanding

"The lapse of year and month and day and hour  
Amid the waste of shifting sand around."

*The Druid's Prophecies*, p. 69, is redolent of Ussian, in which the Roman empire comes in for a fierce de-

nunçiation after the manner of Cowper's "Boadicea." Byron's "The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold," a favourite with boys, had taken possession of the young poet's mind, and he writes in much the same strain several pieces—*The Expedition of Nadir Shah into Hindostan*, p. 79, *God's Denunciations against Pharaoh-Hophra, or Apries*, p. 120, *Babylon*, p. 184.

Besides these the volume contains a few pieces in which the loveliness of moonlight is dwelt upon, *The Walk at Midnight*, p. 131, *Sublimity*, p. 103, etc. This is a common feature of the English poets from Ossian to Matthew Arnold; the Romanticists were extremely fond of laying the action of their pieces in a moonlit environment. The Romantic poets loved to pace in the moonlight and compose their verses, and young Tennyson thus depicts himself

"The whispering leaves, the gushing stream,  
Where trembles the uncertain moon,  
Suit more the poet's pensive dream,  
Than all the jarring notes of noon."

This is one of the finest pieces, and is introduced with a quotation from Virgil—"Tremulo sub-lumine." Numerous other quotations from the classics are placed at the head of the poems. The names of Virgil, Horace, Claudian, Cicero, Xenophon, Pliny, Ovid, Terence, Lucretius, Sallust, give the volume an air of scholarship; while those of Gray, Scott, Byron,<sup>o</sup> Moore, Beattie, Milton, Ossian, Burke, Hume, Racine, Rollin, Young, Rousseau, remind

the reader that the young poets did not neglect the moderns in their classical enthusiasm.

The volume closes with a ballad of some power entitled *King Charles's Vision*. This, along with *The Bridal* and *The Coach of Death*, afterwards published in the *Memoir*, shows that Tennyson had gravitated to the old ballads for poetic material. His *Coach of Death* is a weird fragment, and may be classed among such poems as Matthew Gregory Lewis's *Tales of Terror and Wonder*; they are offshoots of Romanticism.

The publication of *Poems by Two Brothers* committed Tennyson to the rôle of being a poet. Although the authors of such a volume might have come to nothing as poets if they had not persevered in their art, its publication had an influence on their after career. To publish poetry in early life before the powers are matured has always the effect of making a young man try to live up to the reputation, or "private renown," as Lamb calls it, acquired among his little circle of admirers and acquaintances, and endeavour to surpass the first effort; and doubtless this was the effect it had on the three brothers, who all came to be good poets, and one of them a great one. In this volume, as they themselves put it, they passed their Rubicon.

The general trend of Alfred's pieces in the small volume is that Life is a very deceptive prize in spite of Hopes which lead the pilgrim through the world from infancy to old age. His juvenile poems are a contribution to that literature of Sweet Melancholy which runs through the minor poetry of the

eighteenth century, and which flooded the realms of poetry with plangent odes, dirges, elegies, and sonnets innumerable of the lachrymose type. Their character is summed up in two lines from *Memory*, p. 6—

“ In every rose of life,  
Alas ! there lurks a canker.”



## CHAPTER II.

### COLLEGE LIFE, CAMBRIDGE.

CHARLES and Alfred Tennyson left their father's house and came up to Cambridge in February, 1828, where they matriculated at Trinity College on the 20th of the month. Frederick, 'the eldest of the brothers, who was already there, was a distinguished scholar, and had won the University medal for the best Greek Ode on the Pyramids (*Mem.* i. p. 33). The last glimpse we have of the two brothers before coming to Cambridge is in the days of the publication of the joint volume. They hired a carriage with some of the money earned and drove to their favourite Mablethorpe to have a ramble along the waste-sea-shore, and so "shared their triumph with the winds and waves" (*Mem.* i. p. 23).

Frederick Tennyson had been sent to Eton in his tenth year (Milnes' *Poets and Poetry of the Century*, iv. 2), and, like Alfred, was a poet, given at this time to the grandiose subjects which attract all young poets and are selected at the Universities in the Prize Poem competition. His principal poem in the *Poems by Two Brothers* is *The Oak of the North*, treating very musically in octosyllabics of

the same subject as Cowper's *Yardley Oak*. To take the prize poem on *The Pyramids* was a natural consequence of the interest in Egypt the brothers had shown in their volume. In the general trend of his mind Frederick was more akin to Alfred than Charles was, which is obvious from a perusal of the brothers' respective contributions to the volume. The future author of *Letty's Globe* is the writer of all the witty and whimsical pieces in the *Poems by Two Brothers*. These are mostly written in the Heroic couplet, *Sunday Mobs*, p. 197, *Phrenology*, p. 200, *Imagination*, p. 204, *On being asked for a Simile*, p. 140, are by Charles. The poem on *Phrenology* shows acquaintance with the scientific problems of the time, and it is written with a vein of waggery highly diverting. Among the three brothers Charles seems to have been the wit.

Three such young men as the Tennysons must have been a welcome addition to the University life of Cambridge, and, though they were shy, as highly cultivated youths often are, they soon drew a genial circle around them. Among their friends were Spedding (afterwards author of the *Life of Bacon*); Milnes (afterwards Lord Houghton), a poet himself and afterwards biographical editor of Keats; Trench (afterwards Archbishop of Dublin), also of poetical ability; Alford (afterwards Dean of Canterbury); W. H. Thompson (afterwards Master of Trinity); the Hon. Stephen Spring Rice; Charles Merivale (afterwards Dean of Ely); J. M. Kemble; Heath (Senior Wrangler of 1832); Charles R. Bullen; R. Monteith; R. J. Tennant; John Sterling; and

Arthur H. Hallam, son of the historian (*Mem.* i. p. 35).

The Tennysons occupied rooms at No. 22 Rose Crescent, afterwards at Trumpington Street, No. 57 Corpus Buildings (*Mem.* i. p. 34), and Tennyson complained of the country being "disgustingly level" round about Cambridge, that the revelry of the place was monotonous and the studies of the University uninteresting. (*Mem.* i. p. 34.) With his new friends, however, there must have been lively talks, for they were a high-spirited, poetical set, full of speculation, and enthusiastic about the great literatures of the past and about the modern schools of thought. The modern poets in favour among them were Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats. (*Mem.* i. p. 36.) Fitzgerald says: "The German school, with Coleridge, Julius Hare, etc., to expound, came to reform all our notions. I remember that Livy and Jeremy Taylor were the greatest poets next to Shakespeare. I am not sure if you were not startled at hearing that Eutropius was the greatest lyric poet except Pindar. You hadn't known he was a poet at all. I remember A. T. quoting Hallam (the great historian) as pronouncing Shakespeare 'the greatest man.' I thought such dicta rather peremptory for a philosopher. 'Well,' said A. T., 'the man one would wish perhaps to show as a sample of mankind to those in another planet!' He used sometimes to quote Milton as the sublimest of all poets, and his two similes, one about the 'gunpowder ore,' and the other about 'the fleet,' as the grandest of all similes. He thought that *Lycidas* was a touchstone of poetic

taste. Of Dryden, 'I don't know how it is, but Dryden always seems greater than he shows himself to be.' (Mem. i. p. 36.)

Alfred Tennyson did not neglect poetry while at Cambridge. As yet he had not composed much in blank verse except his dramatic fragments given in the *Memoir*, but he now addressed himself to acquire a knowledge of style in that noble measure, which he was to make peculiarly his own. His admiration of Milton perhaps actuated him in this matter, but it was not Milton whom he set himself to imitate, for the imitation of Milton by the poets of the eighteenth century, Young, Thomson, Akenside, and even Cowper had debased blank verse style by the employment of Milton's Latinisms to subjects not suited to them. It was Coleridge especially whom he at first attempted to imitate, and his *Lover's Tale* was the result. One of the devices of blank-versifiers is that of designed repetitions of words and phrases which abound in some poets more than others. Milton employs this device in a well-known passage in the fourth book of *Paradise Lost*, commencing

"Sweet is the breath of morn, her rising sweet,"

in which the changes are rung on the word "sweet." Cowper in the opening of the *Task* imitates this passage of Milton. Coleridge, who was the first modern English poet to free blank verse entirely from the eighteenth century pedantry, was extremely fond of designed repetitions. His first pieces in blank verse are not thus heavily adorned; in the first volume of poems he published, in 1796, the best

blank verse poem *The Æolian Harp* (written at Clevedon) contains only one case of repetition—

“most soothing sweet it is  
To sit beside *our cot, our cot* o’ergrown  
With white flowered jasmine and the broad-leaved myrtle;”

but in the second edition of his poems, published in 1797, two new pieces in blank verse appeared, the *Dedication* to his brother George and the *Lines on having left a Place of Retirement*, and designed repetitions appear much oftener. In the depiction of passion designed repetitions have a masterly effect, like the haltings of a distraught mind repeating itself until able to gather sufficient and appropriate language to express the continuation of its vehemence. In Coleridge’s *Night Scene*, a lover, Earl Henry, relates his story to his friend, Sandoval. The passionate fluctuations of the narrator’s mind are finely indicated by the employment of designed repetitions of word and phrase. The poet by this means attains to the combined passion and restraint of art admirably suited to the dramatic handling of that excitement of the soul which is the theme of poetry of the tragic or semi-tragic kind. Earl Henry, in imagination, has filled all nature with his passion; the very stars above are implicated and suffused with the rapture of his joy. His love is too vast for man and is feared as an alien.

Tennyson’s *Lover’s Tale* tells the story of the passion of Julian for his cousin Camilla, who is in love with his friend Lionel; and the scene of the discovery of her love for Lionel is laid in a situation

similar to that of the *Night Scene*. Julian tells the story himself and the fluctuations of his mind are expressed by Tennyson by the often repeated words and phrases of the agitated narrator. The following will serve as a sample—

“ Last we came  
 To what our people call ‘ The Hill of Woe.’  
 A bridge is there, that, look’d at from beneath  
 Seems but a cobweb filament to link  
 The yawning of an earthquake-cloven chasm.  
 And thence one night, when all the winds were loud,  
 A woeful man (for so the story went)  
 Had thrust his wife and child and dash’d himself  
 Into the dizzy depth *below*. *Below*,  
 Fierce in the strength of far descent, a stream  
 Flies with a shatter’d foam along the chasm.  
 The path was perilous, loosely strewn with crags :  
 We mounted slowly ; yet to both there *came*  
 The joy of life in steepness *overcome*,  
 And victories of ascent, and *looking down*  
 On all that had *look’d down* on us ; and *joy*  
 In *breathing* nearer heaven ; and *joy* to me,  
 High over all the azure-circled earth,  
 To *breathe* with her as if in heaven itself.”

The following is the passage identifying all Nature with Love : —

“ Else had the life of that delightful hour  
 Drunk in the largeness of the utterance  
 Of Love : but how should Earthly Measure mete  
 The Heavenly-unmeasured or unlimited Love,  
 Who scarce can tune his high majestic sense  
 Unto the thundersong that wheels the spheres,  
 Scarce living in the Æolian harmony,  
 And flowing odour of the spacious air,  
 Scarce housed within the circle of this Earth.

Be cabin'd up in words and syllables  
 Which pass with that which breathes them? Sooner Earth  
 Might go round Heaven, and the strait girth of Time  
 Inswathe the fulness of Eternity,  
 Than language grasp the infinite of Love."

Further on, when the cousins descend into the bosky hollow in the darkness where they

"Held converse sweet and low—low converse sweet"—

her lover says—

"Even then the stars  
 Did tremble in their stations as I gazed,"

which is the equivalent of Coleridge's stars "like eyes suffused with rapture." The line

"Nothing in Nature is unbeautiful,"

is an echo of Coleridge's well-known

"In Nature there is nothing melancholy."

(*The Nightingale*).

Tennyson, though receiving much praise from his friends for the *Lover's Tale*, felt that it was immature and exaggerated in style. What in Coleridge were liberties were converted into licences and over-luxuriance, and after seeing the poem in print, he repented and did not proceed with the publication. Nevertheless, the *Lover's Tale* is not to be despised; in writing it Tennyson had begun to form his blank verse style.

"Alfred Tennyson," says a friend, "was six feet high, broad-chested, strong-limbed, his face Shake-

spearian, with deep eyelids, his forehead ample, crowned with dark wavy hair, his head finely poised, his hand the admiration of sculptors, long fingers with square tips, soft as a child's but of great size and strength. What struck one most about him was the union of strength with refinement." (*Mem.* i. p. 35). He was subject to moods of melancholy, though he had the passionate heart of a poet, as we can see from his *Lover's Tale*. Notwithstanding this he worked at his composition of Latin and Greek odes and joined in the debates and conversations of the university life. A society called "The Apostles" included most of his friends, Sterling, Arthur H. Hallam, Blakesley, Edmund Lushington, Douglas Heath, Spedding, Trench, Spring Rice, Thompson, Brookfield, J. M. Kemble, Buller, etc. There were regular meetings of the society, at which debates took place on subjects proposed by the members. Alfred Tennyson, however, was not one of the loud members; his natural shyness restrained him from taking a very prominent part in the intellectual skirmishes. Douglas Heath says he was accustomed to sit "in front of the fire, smoking and meditating, and now and then mingling in the conversation" (*Mem.* p. 43). With a short phrase he was wont to sum up the issue of the argument. It was a rule that each member had to give an essay in regular succession, or give a dinner in default. Tennyson wrote only one essay on *Ghosts*, but was too shy to deliver it himself. From all this it is evident that Alfred Tennyson, with his fine physique and good looks, was too sensitive to mingle in the full bustle



of university life. He shone more in private conversation with his close friends, and to this may be attributed partly the depth of his friendship for Arthur H. Hallam, who, though like minded with Tennyson in his poetical inclinations, was the opposite of Tennyson in having those reliant qualities which make the ready speaker and debater. Among the young Cambridge set Arthur H. Hallam seems, by common consent, to have been the most able and alert mind; and Tennyson was not exaggerating when in after days he portrayed him as the coming man of his time.

On the 6th of June Tennyson won the prize medal for his poem in blank verse on *Timbuctoo*. Prize poems at Cambridge had hitherto been written in the heroic couplet, and it was an innovation to grant the prize for a poem in blank verse. The poem was a patch up of an earlier piece on the Battle of Armageddon. The poem is free from those repetitions that are overdone in the *Lover's Tale*; in fact, Tennyson had abandoned the style of his tale. But it is not so original in expression and imagery as its predecessor. Hallam wrote to Gladstone on 14th September 1829, that he considered "Tennyson as promising fair to be the greatest poet of our generation, perhaps of our century." (*Mem.* i. 46.) Certainly *Timbuctoo* is a good specimen of the Prize Poem species, but it does not prognosticate a genius of first-rate poetic power. Matthew Arnold takes the credit of having, on reading the poem on its appearance, prophesied that Tennyson would become a great poet. (*Mem.* i. 47.) *Timbuctoo* is a poem of

the grandiose rather than the great order. Despite the fine lines about the flowing of the illimitable years, it is vague in its meaning and without any of those home touches which distinguish great poetry. A greatness at this time could be augured from the *Lover's Tale* rather than from *Timbuctoo*; and, of course, Arthur Hallam was including the *Lover's Tale*, of which he was extremely fond, in his estimate of Tennyson at this period (*Mem.* i. 83-84, 88). Brooding over the Vast and the ability to write choice polished verse on such subjects as the Battle of Armageddon, the Fall of Babylon, the Pyramids, and Timbuctoo, with rhetorical flourishes in melodious language about Space and Time, are incidental to youth and not to be discouraged in the young; but they are not a symptom of future greatness.

It was characteristic of Tennyson that he did not declaim Timbuctoo himself in the Senate House; his friend Merivale undertook that responsibility for the shy poet. Tennyson's brother Charles in the same year, 1829, won a Bell Scholarship for the beauty of his translations from the Greek and Roman classics. (*Mem.* i. 48.)

Private theatricals are a favourite amusement with some students who join this to their other hobbies and pranks. Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing* was played at Cambridge in 1830, Kemble taking Dogberry, Hallam Verges, and Milnes played Beatrice, who, to the great amusement of the audience, crashed through a couch and fluffed up as a heap of petticoats. Alfred Tennyson joined in these histrionic experiments, making a good Malvolio. He also

declaimed some of his favourite ballads, *Clerke*, *Saunders*, *Helen of Kirkconnel*, *May Margetret*, and his own poems *The Hesperides*, *The Lover's Tale*, *The Coach of Death*; and he improvised on occasions. "Oriana," Fitzgerald says, "Tennyson used to repeat in a way not to be forgotten." (*Mem.* i. p. 48.) For exercise "he either rowed or fenced, or took long walks, and would go any distance to see 'a bubbling brook.' 'Somehow,' he would say, 'water is the element I love best of all the four.'" (*Mem.* i. p. 48.)

Tennyson's first volume, *Poems, chiefly Lyrical*, was published in 1830. Favourable reviews appeared by Sir John Bowring (afterwards translator of Goethe's Poems) in the *Westminster Review*, by Leigh Hunt in the *Tatler*, and by Arthur H. Hallam in the *Englishman's Magazine*. The *Westminster* said, "If our estimate of Mr. Tennyson be correct, he too is a poet; and many years hence may be read his juvenile description of that character with the proud consciousness that it has become the description and history of his own work." Hallam says, "There is a strange earnestness in his worship of beauty which throws a charm over his impassioned song more easily felt than described, and not to be escaped by those who have once felt it. The features of original genius are clearly and strongly marked." (*Mem.* i. 49.) The critical friends were right this time; there is no doubt about the originality of many of the poems in this volume.

The age in which *Poems, chiefly Lyrical* appeared was the age of the *Annals* got up by Alaric A.

Watts and others at great cost. These publications contained contributions from all the rising men and women of ability of the period. Scott, Mrs. Hemans, L. E. L., Mrs. Norton, Miss Jewsbury, James Hogg, Allan Cunningham, Thomas Campbell, Miss Mitford, Thomas Hood, Praed, James Montgomery, Horace Smith and many more contributed. Fine steel engravings of portraits of the heroines of the effusions or reproductions of the pictures of Turner and other artists accompanied the poems. Many of the pieces were of the dainty, namby-pamby order. Tennyson could write in this strain in his *Claribel*, *Lilian*, *Madeline*, and other girl creations. In these he did not rise above his contemporaries. It was in *Mariana*, *Ode to Memory*, *The Poet*, the *Ballad of Oriana*, *A Dirge*, and the *Dying Swan* that he excelled and gave his distinctive note. He united the cameo-clearness of Keats with the dream-haze and slumberous melody of Coleridge in these pieces. The *Dying Swan* is the masterpiece of the volume, importing for the first time the landscape of the fen country into English poetry with masterly handling.

"Some blue peaks in the distance rose,  
 And white against the cold-white sky  
 Shone out their crowning snows.  
 One willow over the river wept,  
 And shook the wave as the wind did sigh;  
 Above in the wind sung the swallow,  
 Chasing itself at its own wild will,  
 And far through the marish green and still  
 The tangled water-courses slept,  
 Shot over with purple, and green, and yellow."  
 (*First Version*).

This is Keats's art perfected; what follows is the rhythmic freedom of Coleridge, but perfectly, un-borrowed and original because laid in scenery with whose features Tennyson was intimately acquainted. *Mariana in the Moated Grange* is another of those transcripts of the genius of a locality suited to a subject selected from Shakespeare. The *Ballad of Oriana* is a fine rolling war piece founded on the rhythm of one of his own boyish experiments (*The Vale of Bones*), which had deeply embedded itself in his fancy. *A Dirge* is an imitation of Chatterton's style, interfused with his love of old English words, which might serve for a dirge over the grave of the marvellous boy of Bristol.

" Wild words wander here and there ;  
 God's great gift of speech abused  
 Makes thy memory confused :  
     But let them rave.  
 The balm-cricket carols clear  
 In the green that folds thy grave.  
     Let them rave."

*The Ode to Memory, Love and Death*, and *The Poet* are more personal, the first looking back to the Past, the second the philosophy of the Present, and the third glances forward to the Future. *The Poet* is the most ambitious of all the poems and indicates how Tennyson regarded the poet as the prophet of his age sent with a message to his fellow-men. Mr. Stopford Brooke has thus finely dealt with this poem. "In that poem Tennyson lays down, and out of his own inward experience, what he conceived himself to

be, and how he conceived his work ; and he never abandoned, betrayed, or enfeebled his conception. It is a remarkable utterance for so young a man, weighty with that steadiness of temper which, if it diminished spontaneity in his art, yet gave it a lasting power.

“ The poet in a golden clime was born,  
With golden stars above ;  
Dower'd with the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn,  
The love of love.”

That is the beginning, and the first needs of the poet's nature could scarcely be better expressed. Then he speaks of the clear insight into God and man which is the best gift of the poet.

“ He saw thro' life and death, thro' good and ill,  
He saw thro' his own soul,  
The marvel of the everlasting will,  
An open scroll,  
Before him lay.”

Then his thoughts, blown like arrow-seeds over the whole world with melodies and light, take root, and become flowers in the heart of men, till high desires are born and truth is multiplied on truth.

“ And thro' the wreaths of floating dark upcurl'd  
Rare sunrise flow'd.”

And in that sunrise, Freedom clothed in wisdom came upon Man and shook his spirit, and ruined anarchies and oppressions. This was Tennyson's youthful conception of his work, and we should never forget

it when we read his poetry." (*Tennyson, his Art and Relation to Modern Life*, p. 73.)

All Tennyson's poems are not the work of a laborious self-culture. The *Dying Swan*, *Locksley Hall*, "The Splendour falls" are as spontaneous as *Tam o' Shanter*, the *Ancient Mariner*, or the *Sensitive Plant*. They appear to have been written in one blast of the spirit; they may have been afterwards subjected to careful revision, but they are poems of spontaneous emotion. *The Poet* belongs to this class; it is Tennyson's declamatory assertion of the place of the poet as one of the civilising forces of the world.

*Isabel* is the only one of his dainty women pictures with any distinctive character; it is Tennyson's first expression of the worship of pure womanhood, to which he so often gave voice in after years, and it is said to be a picture of his mother.

"The crown and head,  
The stately flower of female fortitude  
Of perfect wifhood and pure lowlihead."

The volume in its language gives evidence of a study of the older poets, Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton, and of Keats. In *Elegiacs* "blossomy" is a Coleridge word (from *The Nightingale*); "hyaline," "profulgent," and the frequent use of nouns as verbs, such as

"All that blue heaven which hues and paves  
The other."

(*Supposed Confessions*).

the love of the weak ending *ing*, such as *wandering* to rhyme to *wing*, a favourite in the rhyming scheme of Keats (used in *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, for instance), in the song, "The lintwhite and the throstle-cock," and the sonnet, "Could I outwear my present state of woe," give an air of affectation. "Broad-vans" for "wings" in the sonnet, "Shall the hag Evil die with child of Good," is from Milton; "eyne" in the same sonnet is a Chaucer word. In the sonnet, "The pallid thunder-stricken sigh for gain," we have

"Pleached with her hair in mail of argent light."

In the sonnet entitled *Love* we have "emperry," another of Keats's favourites. Combinations without the hyphen, such as "Summernoön" (*Supposed Confessions*), "*Downsloped* was *westering* in his bower" (afterwards changed to the natural "was sloping toward his western bower"), said of sunset in *Mariana*, witness to the young poet's peculiar tendency for the fantastic in language and imagery.

The most profound in feeling though far from the most excellent in expression of all the poems of the volume is the *Supposed Confessions of a second-rate sensitive mind not in harmony with Itself*. The poem already foreshadows all those doubtings regarding the validity of the creeds and cravings for a fuller life which Tennyson debated at fuller length in *In Memoriam*. The poem need not be taken as a confession of the poet's own mental state at this time; it is semi-dramatic, written in the tone and temper of Coleridge's *Dejection*, also the con-



fession of a sensitive mind; one passage beginning in imitation of the second strophe of *Dejection* was omitted by after revision. It is *Dejection* over again, but for a new age which had begun to mingle doubt of the creeds with that gloom of the imagination which attacks over sensitive poetic natures. Hence its title, and hence its conclusion after a simile of the life of the lamb compared with the life of man.

" Shall man live thus, a joy and hope,  
As a young lamb, who cannot dream,  
Living, but that he shall live on?  
Shall we not look into the laws  
Of life and death, and things that seem,  
And things that be, and analyse  
Our double nature, and compare  
All creeds till we have found the one,  
If one there be? "

*The Mystic* is a counterpart to the *Confessions*. Its hero is the man of faith at any cost whose system of thought transcends and surrounds all creeds and schemes of human devising. When we bring these two poems into juxtaposition we discern that the *Confessions* is only semi-biographical and not to be taken as a literal confession by Tennyson, for in *The Mystic* the poet presents the reverse side of the shield.

Tennyson now engaged in the most extraordinary episode of his young manhood. Along with Arthur Hallam he went to the Pyrenees with money to assist the insurgent allies of Torrijos. This leader had raised the standard of revolt against the tyranny of Ferdinand, King of Spain, who had set up the Inquisition. The two youths decamped rather

mysteriously and were not heard of for some weeks, and no very definite information is forthcoming about the escapade. This was in July 1830, and they did not return till late in the autumn, rather disillusioned about the revolt (*Mem.* i. 51-55). Carlyle's account of John Sterling's connection with the Spanish affair (*Life of Sterling*, chap. ix. and x.) is as misty as that of the *Memoir*; and we have to come to the conclusion that the English participators were rather ashamed of their adventure and withheld information from their friends.

While in France Tennyson wrote *Mariana in the South*, and he visited Cauteretz, the scene of his most beautiful description of a waterfall (in *Enone*), and of which he also wrote one of his imperishable lyrics thirty-two years afterwards.

While at college Tennyson was always "on the look-out for every new idea, and for every old idea with a new application which may tend to meet the growing requirements of society" (Duke of Argyll, in the House of Lords, August 13th, 1894; *Mem.* i. p. 67). At the life of a great university may be discerned the "Dawn of the New Age," as it is called, which is always

"Half-built against the sky,"

as Mr. William Watson has it, for we are always on the verge of innovation. It is common to talk of certain periods of history as "ages of transition," ignoring the fact that all periods of historic time are such, though in some the speed of change is greater than in others. It is at a great university, among the

seething speculative opinions of young men between twenty and twenty-five that a man endowed with any thinking capacity will assimilate the ideas "tending to the birth," as Joubert puts it, and to give expression to which is the province of the artist in language. He will thus help the birth of the new age. This was the effect of Cambridge life upon Alfred Tennyson. He was a young man of capacity, endowed with an eye for beauty far above the average, and gifted with a sensitiveness<sup>o</sup> of soul responsive to all the budding ideas of the time; and university life did him good socially and helped to draw him out of that self-isolation to which he was by nature prone.

Notwithstanding this he must, like all poets, have his little grumble against his *Alma Mater*, and wrote consequently some denunciatory lines against her, describing her as

"You that do profess to teach,  
And teach us nothing, feeding not the heart."

Characteristically, like all other poets, Alfred Tennyson looked back to his days at Trinity as those "dawn-golden times" (*Mem.* i. 68), in which reversal of feeling he was not singular, for it is the nature of poets to feel cabined and confined by university life and then look back upon it and transform it into a dream—

"Clothing the palpable and the familiar  
With golden exhalations of the dawn."o

In February 1831 Tennyson left Cambridge, for his father was somewhat ailing and wished him to

return home. On the night of leaving he gave a supper in his rooms in Corpus Buildings (*Mem.* i. 71). He had not been long at Somersby when his father passed away in March 1831. Somersby, however, had not to be left by the Tennysons, the new incumbent being willing that they should live on at the Rectory. (*Mem.* i. 72, 74.)

Tennyson's life at Somersby was diversified by visits of Arthur Hallam, now engaged to the poet's sister Emily. Like her brother, Emily had the dark eyes and hair, with the colouring of Italy or the south of France, which made strangers take them for foreigners. Here the two young men engaged in reading Shakespeare, Milton, Chaucer, Spenser, and Campbell's patriotic ballads (*Mem.* i. pp. 76-77), and the three read Dante, Petrarch, Tasso, Ariosto, and Don Quixote in the original, Arthur Hallam being Emily's instructor in Italian (*Mem.* i. 77, 79). They also read Erskine of Linlathen (*Mem.* i. 81), one of the early gropers after the New Theology. Tennyson, too, went up to London and smoked in Hallam's den at the top of a house in a long unlovely street (*Mem.* i. 83). In July 1832 the two friends went for a tour on the Rhine (*Mem.* i. 87), and Arthur Hallam wrote to Emily their experiences. About this period the country was in a state of agitation on the Reform Bill, but Tennyson and Hallam were more concerned about a new volume of poems about to be published by Tennyson. Alfred's fresh poems had been circulating in MS. among his friends for about two years. Some of their acquaintances could even repeat the poems off.

Thus Spedding writes to Thompson on 18th July, 1832:—"I say, a new volume by A. T. is in preparation, and will, I suppose, be out in autumn. In the meantime I have no copy of the *Palace of Art*, but shall be happy to repeat it to you when you come; no copy of the *Legend of Fair Women*, but can repeat about a dozen stanzas, which are of the finest; no copy of the conclusion of *Ænone*, but one in pencil which none but myself can read" (*Mem.* i. 86-87). The volume came out near the end of the year, but it was pre-dated 1833.

The Poems of 1832-3 are not free from the affectations of orthography of its predecessor, the volume of 1830. In *Ænone* appear "glenriver," "steep down," "tendriltwine," "scarletwinged," and double epithets are frequent, such as "water-rounded" and "river-sundered," "marble-white" and "marble-cold," and "lily-cradled." In the first twenty lines of the original *Ænone* there are a dozen such combinations. A well-known passage figures in the 1832-3 volume as

"Selfreverence, selfknowledge, selfcontrol  
Are the three hinges of the gates of Life,  
That open into power, every way  
Without horizon, bound or shadow of cloud  
Yet not for power," etc.

In *Eleinore* Tennyson gives another delineation of a girl, worked up in luxurious imagery in which the human characterisation is almost smothered in the minutæ of the similes. *Margaret*, *Kate*, and *Rosalind* are three other fanciful sketches of girls pretty enough in their way; but the best of these dainty

pieces is an overflowing from the latter, printed as a footnote. It is a complete poem in itself and worth all the others: it seems to have erred in its author's estimation by its simplicity, which is what the others want.

Besides these over-ornamented things were creations of a different order, the very height of the simplicity of art in which the poet had attained to nature. The *Miller's Daughter* was one of them.

Miss Mitford had about this time already written some of her matchless village sketches, and in 1827 there appeared in the *Literary Souvenir*, one of Alaric A. Watts's annuals, a piece named *The Queen of the Meadow*. It is the love story of Katy Dawson, the miller's daughter. The story commences:—"It was a pretty scene on a summer afternoon was that old mill, with its strong lights and shadows, its low-browed cottage, covered with the clustering pyracantha, and the clear brook, which, after dashing, and foaming, and brawling, and playing off all the airs of a mountain river whilst pent up in the mill stream, was no sooner let loose than it subsided into its natural peaceful character, and crept quietly along the valley, meandering through the green woody meadows as tranquil as a trout stream as ever Isaac Walton angled in. Many a passenger has stayed his step to admire the old buildings of Hatherford Mill, backed by its dark orchard, especially when the accompanying figures, the jolly miller sitting before the door, pipe in mouth and jug in hand, like one of Teniers's boors, the mealy miller's man with his white sack over his shoulder

carefully descending the out-of-door steps, and the miller's daughter flitting about amongst her poultry, give life and motion to the picture. The scenery on the other side of the road was equally attractive. Its principal feature was the great farm of the parish, an old manorial house, solid and venerable, with a magnificent clump of witch elms in front of the porch, a suburb of outbuildings behind, and an old-fashioned garden, with its rose of espaliers, its wide flower borders, and its close filterd walk, stretching like a cape into the waters, the strawberry beds sloping into the very stream; so that the cows which, in sultry weather, came down by twos and by threes from the opposite meadows to cool themselves in the water, could almost crop the leaves as they stood." (*Literary Souvenir*, pp. 177-8, 1827.)<sup>4</sup>

Mary Russell Mitford is one of the chief exponents of that school of writers whose work may be designated the "Literature of the Observation of Nature," which has as its founder James Thomson, the author of *The Seasons*, and includes in its ranks Gilbert White of Selborne, William Cowper the poet, Gilpin the author of *Forest Scenery*, Wordsworth, and in its more modern phase, Richard Jefferies, Richard Blackmore, Mr. John Bourroughs, and Mr. Thomas Hardy. They write with their eye upon the object and describe with realistic touches the beauty of nature and common life. Miss Mitford's tale of the Meadow Queen gave Tennyson the hint for his *Miller's Daughter*. The situation is the same with slight differences, for, of course, Tennyson idealises. The name of the

occupant of the large old farm is a young gentleman named Edward Gray, who has newly come to the locality, and falls in love with Katy Dawson. Along with Miss Mitford's influence in the formation of this beautiful idyll must be added that of Coleridge's blank verse idyll, entitled *The Picture, or the Lover's Resolution*, which supplied a hint for the incident of stanza commencing "Then leapt a trout" in its original form, which ran

" A water rat from off the bank  
I lunged in the stream. With idle care,  
Downlooking through the sedges rank,  
I saw your troubled image there,  
Upon the dark and dimpled beck  
It wandered like a floating light,  
A full fair form, a warm white neck,  
And two white arms—how rosy white !"

This realism was too much for the critics of the time, and Tennyson afterwards substituted the leap of the trout for the plunge of the water rat. A romantic idealist like Coleridge, of course, would never have introduced a water rat into an English idyll; his stream image is disturbed by a handful of wild flowers being thrown into the pool: but the love for realistic description had made rapid strides since the year 1802, when Coleridge wrote his idyll.

From the perusal of Mary Russell Mitford we must attribute a healthy influence on Tennyson, for whenever he took a suggestion from her works he scored a success; she put "the salt of life" (as she called it in her preface) into him. The *Miller's*



*Daughter* is one of Tennyson's successes. The *May Queen*, too, is another, and may be attributed to that movement which came down from lefty Eleānores and Claribels and tried to put in verse the pathos of everyday life, for the *May Queen* will stand alongside *Alice Fell* as one of the most profoundly pathetic of human documents. The *Sisters* is a fine specimen of simple art after the old ballads. The *Lady of Shalott* is Tennyson's first venture into the fascinating domain of Arthurian Romance, which was afterwards to exercise such a strong hold upon him. The *Lotos Eaters* was a masterpiece of melody which Tennyson hardly ever excelled for luxurious charm. It was the outcome of his boyish proclivity for Egypt and the Lotos, which so often makes its appearance in the *Poems by Two Brothers*, united with a later study of the classics, but indicating a dangerous tendency for the sumptuous.

*Mariana in the Moated Grange* of the former volume was one of those finely localised pictures in which congruity of thought and imagery are beautifully adjusted. "In *Mariana in the Moated Grange*," says Sir Alfred Lyall (*Life of Tennyson*, p. 19), "we see how a few words can take hold of and enchant the fancy until it conjures up images of the landscape, the mournful aspect of a decaying house in a level waste, the chill air of grey dawn, the varying moods of despondency that follow the alternations of sun and shadow, of light and darkness, as they pass before a solitary watcher who looks vainly for some one who never comes."

*Mariana in the South* is the same maid of the aching heart, placed in surroundings quite the opposite of the Lincolnshire scenery of Tennyson's home country : she is in the warm and sunny South away from the swamps and reedy marshes, and the heat is oppressive. The lonely white house with its black shadow slowly wheeling round it during the revolution of the day is a southern counterpart to the northern moated grange in its humid atmosphere. The motion of the shadow of the house described by the poet is a striking instance of that accurate observation of Nature (not added, however, until later than 1832) which Tennyson has introduced. It has the same effect of giving a sense of completeness to the poem as those touches of description of the sunrise in Coleridge's *Alice Du Clos* which hold that poem together. The description of the oncoming of night, too, at the close has seldom been better done in poetry in a couple of lines—

“ And deepening thro’ the silent spheres  
Heaven over Heaven rose the night.”

*The Palace of Art* and *The Dream of Fair Women* are the masterpieces of the 1832-3 volume ; and from them we see what was Tennyson's attitude towards culture in his twenty-third year. The composition of *The Palace of Art* arose out of some talk and correspondence with Arthur Hallam, as we can discern from a letter written by Hallam to his friend of date 26th July 1831. Hallam writes, “ You say pathetically, ‘ Alas for me ! I have more of the

Beautiful than the Good.' Remember for your comfort that God has given you to see the difference. Many a poet has gone on blindly in his artist pride. I am very glad you have been reading Erskine [of Linlathen]. No books have done me so much good, and I always thought you would like them if they came in your way." (*Mem.* i. 81.)

Tennyson's *Palace of Art* may be likened to Pope's *Temple of Fame*, for it holds the same place in Tennyson's poetry as *The Temple of Fame* holds in Pope's. Both poems were written in the twenty-third year of their author's age, and they are both visions of the glory of genius after the manner of the Provençal poets. In *The Palace of Art* Tennyson, we feel, was attempting to give expression to the largest and grandest conception of which his young mind was capable, and it is well to remember that it is the work of a young man of only twenty-three.

Tennyson we know was from the very first strongly theological in the bent of his mind. In spite of his love of beauty in the world around him as well as in woman, he was intensely religious and never sacrificed or disparaged the Good for the sake of the Beautiful. This is the attitude he takes up to art in *The Palace of Art*, and this also betrays how he stood toward Culture, which was now, in the growing recognition of Goethe's greatness, invading England. And the attitude he takes up toward the new propaganda is one of antagonism, for in *The Palace of Art* he describes a colloquy of a<sup>b</sup>

"Glorious Devil, large in heart and brain,"

as he calls him in the Prologue, with his soul. This "glorious Devil" (the expression is rather strong) has cast aside the religious view of life, and has taken to worship the gods of the intellect, the "masters of those who know." His palace was to have contained the creations of art, but the young poet withdrew some descriptions which he had made but which he regarded as inferior to the rest of the work, for in the first published version of the poem are many stanzas excised in later editions.

It cannot be maintained that Tennyson in characterising the gods of the intellect has attained to the singular felicity of Pope in his depictions of the six most conspicuous occupants of the Temple of Fame, Homer, Virgil, Pindar, Horace, Aristotle, and Tully, which render some of the Augustan's lines famous as quotations; but there is much of that fine-phrasing and chiselled work, many of those

"Patient touches of unwearied art"

which satisfy the æsthetic mind. Tennyson's opening with the description of the Palace built on the rock base, the same as the Temple of Fame, is not so sublime as that of Pope, whose description is enhanced by one of his grandest similes; but the conclusion of Tennyson's poem is not so lame as Pope's. Tennyson's poem, on the whole, is a splendid feat for a young man of twenty-three. At the close he leaves the question as to the advantages of culture open; for, although his glorious Devil is about to repent and retire to a humble cottage, he is

going to leave his Palace of Art intact, so that at some future time he may be able to return to it.

"Yet pull not down my palace towers, that are  
So lightly, beautifully built ;  
Perchance I may return with others there  
When I have purged my guilt."

But Tennyson did not remain content with this. As he had formerly presented in opposition to the view that "All things will die," the poem "Nothing will die," and to the *Supposed Confessions* his *Mystic*, he now wrote on the opposite side of the idea of *The Palace of Art*, the *Dream of Fair Women*, its poetical counterpart. Here he takes refuge from the negation expressed in *The Palace of Art* in the depiction of a series of what may be called the fictitious heroines of history, who, combined, make up the Idea of Beautiful Womanhood. The women he selects are those who have been rendered famous by some mishap in their lives, and he draws them in a series of cameos with all the beauty of phrasing and artistic power of Dante. The finest is Jephthah's Daughter, in which the spirit of self-sacrifice is embodied. This is the triumphant note of Tennyson at this period. The depiction of Jephthah's Daughter was the last word he had to say to his contemporaries at this time.

Tennyson's vacillation between the view of things given expression to in *The Palace of Art* and that of *The Dream of Fair Women* is only another instance of the dualism of the poetic mind hovering between the adoration of the Good and the Worship of the Beautiful which has its best expression in the im-

posing Legend of Tannhäuser, and which has characterised nearly all great poets in their youth. But it is generally the beautiful that is in the ascendant in early years. Keats, we know, never reached higher than believing in the Beautiful, that "Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty." Tennyson at twenty-three was hesitating, but inclined to place Truth, the Good, above Beauty; but it was Arthur Hallam who at this time was preserving him from becoming a second Keats.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE PERIOD OF SELF-CULTURE.

TENNYSON was never able to stand criticism with that equanimity which some writers have shown. He had not the fortitude of Wordsworth, who withstood the onset of the critics in his early years. He was over sensitive and resented criticism except from his own intimate friends, with whom he freely discussed the merits and demerits of his poems. But this was making himself the poet of a select circle, the laureate of a university coterie. While by publishing he appealed to the public he grumbled against the non-appreciation of his poetry by those intermediaries 'who act as guides to the public of what is worthy of regard. He had some reason to complain, it is true ; some of the criticisms were too caustic although some were too true, and it was only after recognition of the justice of some of the censures of the critics that he rose on stepping stones above his early self.

The volume of 1830 had received laudatory notices from Leigh Hunt in the *Tatler* and by Arthur Hallam in the *Englishman's Magazine*, but by far the best criticism came from Sir John Bowring in the *Westminster Review* for January 1831. (*Mem.* i. p. 49.) Sir John, after a long preliminary on poetry in

general, of great ability and insight, went on to show that Tennyson had "the secret of the transmigration of the soul." "He seems to obtain entrance into a mind as he would make his way into a landscape; he climbs the pineal gland as if it were a hill in the centre of the scene; looks around on all objects with their varieties of form, their movements, their shades of colour, and their mutual shades and influences." (*Early Reviews*, Scott Library, pp. 311-312); and from this point the critic goes on to demonstrate how Tennyson wrote his *Merman*, *Mermaid*, and *Sea Fairies*, etc. This effusive entrance of Tennyson into Nature, Imaginary Beings, and States of Mind is doubtless due to his attempt to realise that fantastic state of consciousness referred to by Coleridge in his *Picture, or the Lover's Resolution*, in which the love-lorn man, the gentle lunatic who wanders alone through the woods in reverie, is wishing

"Something that he knows not of  
In winds or waters, or among the rocks!"

While thus appreciating Tennyson for his least valuable pieces, for such things as the *Sea Fairies* are devoid of real value, the critic takes exception to the young poet's affectations of style, the employment of antiquated words and obsolete pronunciations. The review, nevertheless, is one of the best written in the days of slashing criticism.

Christopher North's critique in *Blackwood's Magazine* for May 1832 is also, on the whole, appreciative and commendatory. The young poet and his friends were surely not accustomed to reading Christopher's



high animal-spirited articles, else they had not been chagrined at this contribution to criticism. Compared with the average brusque article on poets given by Wilson, it stands out as one of the cleverest, wittiest, and most appreciative of all his overflowings from the celebrated *Noctes Ambrosianæ*. Christopher, of course, brushes aside the criticisms of the *English Magazine* and the *Westminster* like a big mastiff pawing aside two puppies, as the puff of personal friends, and is extremely personal to "Alfred," whom he calls the pet of a coterie and a cockney poet, elevated to the throne of Little England, (*Blackwood's Magazine*, p. 724, May, 1832.)

After this preliminary, Christopher continues—"Thin as is this volume we are now reviewing, and sparse the letterpress on its tiny pages, 'twould yet be easy to extract from it much more unmeaningness; but having shown by gentle chastisement that we love Alfred Tennyson, let us now show by judicious eulogy that we admire him; and, by well-chosen specimens of his fine faculties, that he is worthy of our admiration" (p. 732). Christopher then proceeds to eulogise and quote *The Ode to Memory*, *The Deserted House*, *A Dirge* (entire), *Isabel*, *Mariana in the Moated Grange*, *Adeline*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, *The Ballad of Oriana* (entire), and *Recollections of the Arabian Nights*. "Our critique is near its conclusion; and in correcting it for press we see that its whole merit, which is great, consists in the extracts, which are 'beautiful exceedingly.' Perhaps, in the first part of our article, we may have exaggerated Mr. Tennyson's not unfrequent silliness, for we are

apt to be carried away by the whim of the moment, and in our humorous moods many things wear a queer look to our aged eyes which fill young pupils with tears; but we feel assured that in the second part we have not exaggerated his strength—that we have done no more than justice to his fine faculties—and that the millions who delight in *Maga* will, with one voice, confirm our judgment—that Alfred Tennyson is a poet" (p. 740).

Reading the whole article in the light of a large knowledge of the criticism of those times, Christopher North must be highly extolled for his notice of Tennyson's *Poems*, *chiefly Lyrical*. What he does slaughter in the volume are those poems founded on the power to enter into the spirit of animate and inanimate nature and the shadowy fictions of natural romance—the *Sea Fairies*, the *Mermaid*, the *Merman*, and such like productions. But here the criticism is directed against the critique of the *Westminster Review* rather than the poet and is a part of the fierce antagonism of political opponents kept up in the early decades of the nineteenth century rather than purely poetical criticism. Even the *Dying Swan*, the one irreproachable poem in the whole collection, is thus brought under condemnation; and Christopher, of course, is very merry over Tennyson's personations of the Grasshopper and the Owl. The *Memoir* quotes his remark on the latter—"But Alfred is greatest as an owl. All that he wants is to be shot, stuffed, and stuck in a glass case, to be made immortal in a museum" (731-2). The *Memoir* (p. 84), quoting this as an isolated sentence, without any explanation,

leads one to suppose that Wilson was silly in his personalities, but it is just one of Christopher's rollicking sallies and not intended by the writer to be taken seriously. In the first part of his article he slashes away at the *Westminster* and the Poet and the *Englishman's Magazine*, but in the second portion he makes ample amends and fully recognises Tennyson's genius. Tennyson in his ill-natured letter to North admits that he seldom saw *Blackwood* (*Mem.* p. 95). If he had been a habitual reader of *Maga* he perhaps would not have written the letter nor composed his short poem to "Crusty Christopher," in which for once Tennyson lost his dignity. A young man of twenty-three ought to have felt flattered to have himself brought before the public by Christopher North, for Wilson's criticism is a shrewd discrimination of what is good and valuable and what is faulty in the volume of 1830, a fact attested by the second publication of the poems in which Tennyson discarded or improved most of those condemned by North.

The most vicious attack on Tennyson's early poems was that of the *Quarterly Review* of 1833. The article is self-contradictory. The first part commences in an adulatory strain (*Quarterly Review*, 49, pp. 81-83), and then launches into a tirade ridiculing the false taste of the poet. Many of the passages, words, and phrases thus subjected to ridicule were afterwards excised or rewritten by Tennyson before reappearing in 1842. The critic winds up with an onslaught on Tennyson for writing "Crusty Christopher."

When Tennyson came up to Cambridge, Coleridge, as has been already indicated, was the genius of the new movement of thought prevailing among the young men of ability (see *Life of Frederick Denison Maurice*, by his son, i. 65, 82, 176-7). Tennyson was closely acquainted with all the men of Trinity who shaped the Broad Church movement, and knew Coleridge's works well. He did not like his prose, however, but admired his poetry (*Mem.* i. p. 50), and on one occasion he records that one night he "saw the moonlight reflected in a nightingale's eye as she was singing in the hedgerow," and he wrote his sonnet on the Nightingale on this occasion (*Mem.* i. pp. 79-80). Now Coleridge makes the same remark about the moonlight seen in the eyes of the nightingale

"On moon-lit bushes  
Whose dewy leaflets are but half disclosed,  
You may perchance behold them on the twigs,  
Their bright, bright eyes, their eyes both bright and full  
Glistening."

From this it is evident that Tennyson was being led by Coleridge, as well as by Miss Mitford, to that close observation of nature of which he became the supreme master among English poets; and as he had imitated Coleridge's blank verse in *The Lover's Tale*, he now set himself to cultivate more sedulously that noble measure. He is also indebted to Akenside for some of the devices of his blank verse.

The Tennyson note before Tennyson may be detected in Coleridge here and there. In the following passage from *The Foster Mother's Tale* we

have a touch of that peculiar dwelling upon a certain sonorous word on which the whole strength and security of the passage as melodious verse depends:

“ But yet his speech, it was so soft and sweet  
 The late Lord Valdez ne’er was wearied with him.  
 And once, as by the north side of the chapel,  
 They stood together *chained* in deep discourse,  
 The earth heaved under them with such a groan  
 That the wall tottered and had well-nigh fallen  
 Right on their heads.”

If we read poetry aloud, as all poetry should be read, we find that in every line there is a syllable on which the voice rests or lingers to gather its strength anew before it can finish the line. A line in which the pause is made on a deeply sonorous word is always the most musical, and verse having a predominant number of such lines is the best; it attains to sonority. Tennyson acquired the gift of writing blank verse with many lines of the quality of the fourth line of the above quotation from *The Foster Mother’s Tale*, in which the voice rests and lingers on the word *chained*. He also derived some part of his artistry of blank verse from Hartley Coleridge, whose poetry he now read. He met Hartley at the Lakes in 1835 (*Mem.* i. 103, 133, 153), and Hartley addressed a sonnet to him (*Mem.* i. 154).

The blossom of this activity in blank verse was *The Gardener’s Daughter*, in which Tennyson did perfectly what Coleridge had done imperfectly in his *Picture, or the Lover’s Resolution*. *The Gardener’s Daughter* is a masterpiece of the English blank verse idyll, and has all the self-consciousness of a studied

blank verse. Tennyson had now read Hartley Coleridge's *Leonard and Susan*, which is nearer to Tennyson's style than the spontaneous verse of S. T. C. Hartley was one of those who were constantly

" Searching the word-book for all pretty names,  
All dainty, doting, dear diminutives  
Which the old Romans used to woo withal,"

and he had a touch of the realism of Miss Mitford in his idyll not found in his father. The poem of *The Gardener's Daughter* was written, as we learn from the *Memoir* (i. 103), in 1833, and was circulated among Tennyson's friends for the next few years in MS.

Some of Tennyson's canons of criticism and composition held at this period are interesting as illustrating his methods and ideas of writing. In 1834 he writes to Spedding: "*Apropos* of faults, I have corrected much of my last volume, and if you will send me your copy I would insert my corrections" (*Mem.* i. 141); and again, "I do not wish to be dragged forward again in any shape before the reading public at present, particularly on the score of my own poems, most of which I have so corrected (particularly *Ænone*) as to make them much less imperfect, which you, who are a wise man, would own if you had the corrections." (*Mem.* i. 145.) "The artist is known by his self-limitation." (*Mem.* i. 118.) "First the workman is known for his work, afterwards the work for the workman; but it is only the concise and perfect work which will last." (*Mem.* i.

122.) These maxims of composition show that Tennyson, in spite of his feeling of softness 'at adverse criticism, and even his resolution taken about this time to quit England on account of the chilly reception he got from the recognised organs of critical opinion, was perfecting himself in his art during the ten long years of silence he maintained between 1832 and 1842.

An example of the changes made by Tennyson may be given by comparing the opening of the *Ænone* of 1832 with the revised version of 1842. In 1832 the passage ran:

“ There is a dale in Ida, lovelier  
Than any in old Ionia, beautiful  
With emerald slopes of sunny sward, that lean  
Above the loud glenriver, which hath worn  
A path thro' steepdown granite walls below  
Mantled with flowering tendriltwine. In front  
The cedar-shadowy valleys open wide.”

In 1842 the passage read:

“ There lies a vale in Ida, lovelier  
Than all the valleys of Ionian hills.  
The swimming vapour slopes athwart the glen,  
Puts forth an arm, and creeps from pine to pine,  
And loiters, slowly drawn. On either hand  
The lawns and meadow-ledges midway down  
Hang rich in flowers, and far below them roars  
The long brook falling thro' the clov'n ravine  
In cataract after cataract to the sea.”

This, of course, is a vast improvement. In the second version Tennyson had in mind his remem-

brance of his visit to the valley of Caunteretz, where he had actually seen what he wished to describe for the setting of his classical heroine. *Cenone* was almost wholly rewritten at this time. *The Miller's Daughter* and *The Lady of Shalott* and other pieces were severely revised. The last stanza of *The Lady of Shalott* was rewritten to get quit of a line closely resembling one in *Christabel*, and *Mariana in the South* was much heightened in beauty by revision.

In the autumn of 1833 an event occurred destined to influence Tennyson's cast of thought more than any other occurrence in his life. Arthur Hallam died at Vienna on, the 15th September. He had written to Tennyson, who was in Scotland, in his customary cheerful strain on 31st July, sending Hartley Coleridge's poems, and the two friends had met in London and had a convivial meeting with Moxon, the publisher-poet, and Leigh Hunt (*Mem.* i. p. 103), parting a few days after. The news of Hallam's death fell like a thunderbolt on the Hallam and Tennyson families. Hallam, one of the most extraordinary and promising young men of the early decades of the century, full of life and intellectual activity, was thus cut down in the blossom of his youth. Thus Tennyson lost his ideal friend and future brother-in-law at a time when such a calamity was bound to strengthen his "obstinate questionings" and send him back into the primary problems of existence. Arthur Hallam was buried at Clevedon in a lonely church which overlooks the Bristol Channel. From this event sprang up in Tennyson's mind "short swallow flights" of song, as he called



them, which afterwards grew into *In Memoriam*. At this time he wrote—

“Fair ship that from the Italian shore.”

“With trembling fingers did we weave.”

“When Lazarus left his charnel cave.”

“This truth came borne with bier and pall.”

“It draweth near the birth of Christ.”

Tennyson at the same time wrote his first draft of the *Morte d'Arthur*. *The Two Voices* was also begun under the cloud of sorrow for Hallam's death (*Mem.* i. p. 109); *The Sleeping Beauty* was completed in 1834 (*Mem.* i. 134); *Sir Galahad* we hear of on 19th September 1834 (*Mem.* i. 139); “Love thou thy land” appears in 1834 (*Mem.* i. 141); *Dora*, an idyll after Miss Mitford (taken from *Our Village*), and the *Lord of Burleigh* are mentioned as being in existence in 1835 (*Mem.* i. 153).

Tennyson had contracted an affection before this for Emily Sellwood, and they were quasi engaged, but were not able to marry owing to the want of funds. (*Mem.* i. 150.) They had to wait till 1850 before they could be united. During all this time Tennyson was busy perfecting himself in his art, studying other poets, Wordsworth among others (*Mem.* i. 157), Keats, Milton, and Shakespeare (*Mem.* i. 152), and probing into the most abstruse problems of Life and Deity that have engaged the intellectual since the days of the author of the Book of Job and the time of Æschylus.

Among the studies was Wordsworth's *Michael*, which he read with admiration, though he thought Wordsworth "often clumsy and diffuse. There was no end of *This Thorn* in the piece that bears the name; such hammering to set a scene of so small a drama." He also said that *Lycidas* was "a test of any reader's poetic instinct," and that "Keats, with his high spiritual vision, would have been, if he had lived, the greatest of us all (tho' his blank verse lacked originality of movement), and that there is something magical and of the innermost soul of poetry in almost everything which he wrote." (*Mem.* i. 152.)

Tennyson in 1835 met Edward Fitzgerald, with whom he stayed at the Lakes for some time enjoying himself boating on Lake Windermere. He read Fitzgerald the *Morte D'Arthur* and other poems recently written. After this Tennyson visited London and other parts of England, at which he occasionally wrote a poem. At Torquay he composed *Audley Court*. In 1837 the Tennysons had to leave Somersby. They removed to High Beech, in Epping Forest, and there they lived till 1840, when they again removed to Tunbridge Wells, and from thence to Boxley, near Maidstone, in 1841, to be near the Lushingtons at Park House, Edward Lushington, the Greek and German scholar and Egyptologist, having married Alfred's sister Cecilia. (*Mem.* i. 182.) The residence at these places was diversified by visits to his friends in London and elsewhere. Tennyson was a bright and genial companion among his inner circle of friends, though he had his fits of sadness, when he was less communicative. He was in the

habit of meeting his friends at "The Cock," a restaurant by Temple Bar, to the head waiter of which he addressed one of his well-known pieces in the lighter vein. Tennyson was also a member of the Sterling Club, a literary society so named in honour of John Sterling, where he met some of the old Cambridge "Apostles." Among others were Carlyle, Rogers, "Barry Cornwall," Thackeray, Dickens, Forster, Savage Landor, Macclise, Leigh Hunt, and Tom Campbell. He always showed an eager interest in the events and in the great scientific discoveries and economic inventions and improvements of the time. His talk largely touched upon politics, philosophy, and theology, and the new speculations rife on every side. Upon the project of reform or the great movements of philanthropy he reflected much. (*Mem.* i. 184-5.) Tennyson's best political poem, written about the time of the Reform Bill agitation, is the piece beginning

"Love thou thy land,"

addressed to James Spedding. Tennyson was a conservative Liberal in his young days and a liberal Conservative in his later years. There is a difference between the two; in the later period the drag was oftener put on. *The Golden Year* is another of Tennyson's political poems of this period, an optimistic poem.

Tennyson, after having preserved a silence of ten years, now published his *Poems*, the famous volumes of 1842. The pieces in the volumes of 1830 and 1832-33 had nearly all been touched with the file.

Tennyson was a careful reviser; although he smarted under criticism, he afterwards took advantage of the strictures of Crusty Christopher and the writer of the *Quarterly Review* article, and rejected many of the inferior poems. Professor Churton Collins, in his admirable edition of *The Early Poems of Alfred Lord Tennyson*, exhibits all the corrections Tennyson made from time to time in these poems, and the study of them is an instructive lesson in the art of poetic composition. The publication of the Poems in 1842 was an event in literary history. Scarcely before had a poet at the age of thirty-three put forth such a collection of so many poems of the highest merit.

Besides the best of the volumes of 1830 and 1832-33, the collection of 1842 contained *The Morte D'Arthur* and *The Gardener's Daughter*, two of Tennyson's richest blank verse poems, of which I shall speak hereafter. *St. Simcon Stylites* is a study in religious morbidity, either to show how Tennyson could enter into the genius of a past form of Christianity, or, by painting a gruesome picture of medieval sainthood, condemn it. Other pieces in blank verse were *Dora*, his one realistic idyll; *Audley Court*; *Walking to the Mail*; *Edwin Morris, or the Lake*; *Love and Duty*; *The Golden Year*, all English idylls; and *Ulysses*, Tennyson's finest short piece of blank verse treating of a classical theme, but more indebted to Dante than to Homer for the conception of the character of the hero, who is made the prototype of the modern thirster after the conquest of knowledge.

*The Day Dream* is an enlargement of the theme of *The Sleeping Beauty* of the 1830 volume. The beautiful creation was probably suggested to Tennyson by a legend afterwards made use of by Wagner in his *Siegfried*; it also resembles the lovely description of the sleeping Adonis in the *Endymion* of Keats (Book ii. 387-426). This is one of the most artistically executed of Tennyson's creations; he was always fond of the slumberous side of things where music is the voice of the poppy dreams of fancy. Of this poem he said: "Poetry is like shot silk with many glancing colours. Every reader must find his own interpretation according to his ability, and according to his sympathy with the poet." The poem is a parable, muffled in a low undertone of Eastern melody, of the Past, the Present, and the Future; and the Fated Fairy Prince is Tennyson's Euphorion. *The May Queen* was now finished as we have it, the third part being added to the first two parts published in 1832-33. *The Talking Oak* is one of those pieces of Tennyson in which his observation of nature comes in very prominently. Indeed, some readers will think that Tennyson overloads his verse in this poem with that nature knowledge he cultivated so assiduously. Poetical thought can stand only a certain amount of imagery and nature knowledge; if these are laid on too thickly, however beautiful and true, they smother the idea intended to be expressed. Symmetry of idea and expression is as necessary to the completeness of a poem as congruity of thought and imagery. In *The Talking Oak* the adorning is done for the sake of ornament, and the

idea is overgrown with imagery. The piece seems to be a vindication of the present day girl against the supposed superiority of her Puritan and other ancestors. The poem, notwithstanding, has its beauty, and shows Tennyson in one of the aspects of his many-sidedness.

*The Vision of Sin* is one of Tennyson's triumphs in depicting the history of a soul. The character has lived through all the sensualisms, having dropped down from grade to grade in his career until he has become a cynic whose cynicism is the result of practice, not of merely philosophical theory. The strictures he passes upon others and the manner in which he criticises the world around him indicate his own state of soul and hint at his sensual experiences. Tennyson in this depiction rises to the height of dramatic art. The conclusion, in which the spirits on the mountain are appealed to, and the passage in which it is said

"God made Himself an awful rose of dawn,"

leave the salvability of the sinner in a mystic haze, allowing the reader to read his own interpretation of the allegory. Like *The Day Dream*, it is left to be interpreted how we will.

*The Two Voices* is another of Tennyson's problem poems. In it the question "Is life worth living?" is considered. The poem is introspective and personal, not like *The Vision of Sin*, dramatic, though, of course, we need not take the whole poem as being experience. It was written, we are informed, in a fit of depression after the death of Arthur Hallam,

and is the history, as Spedding said, "of the agitation, the suggestions and counter-suggestions of a mind sunk in hopeless despondency and meditating self-destruction, together with the manner of its recovery to a more healthy condition." (*The Early Poems of Alfred Lord Tennyson*, by J. Churton Collins, p. 210.) The poem is one of the most powerful Tennyson ever wrote, and here again we have a specimen of that dualism by the employment of which he loved to discuss a metaphysical subject as a debate between two contestants, even though only a mood of his own mind. The two "voices," the one the mouthpiece of pessimism and the other the voice of hope, debate with each other for the possession of the soul. The pessimistic voice represents the futility of striving for the attainment of knowledge and self-culture,

" Because the scale is infinite,"

and makes a general depreciation of human life. The other voice that cries "Rejoice! Rejoice!" is the voice of hope, who, in alliance with nature and her beauty, endeavours to win back the soul to a state of contentment with the condition of human life, though it is tinged with sadness and woe.

Immortality and the Transmigration of Souls are also discussed in the poem. The passage on the dead—

" His palms are folded on his breast :  
There is no other thing expressed  
But long disquiet merged in rest"—

is an echo from *The Dirge* of his early years. Arthur

Hallam is probably referred to in the passage commencing

"I found him when my years were few,"

so that Tennyson in *The Two Voices* was building upon his early reminiscences and his new experiences. The reference to the Sabbath morn and the distant pealing of the church bells is perhaps a reference to the Easter-morn scene in *Faust*. The poem is a vindication of the individuality of the soul against the Pantheistic view of life. Perhaps Tennyson had Shelley's position in mind when he wrote the poem; it looks like an answer to the grand closing chorus of *Hellas*, in which the "dust of systems and of creeds" is the subject of Shelley's Pantheistic broodings.

\* *Locksley Hall*, like *The Two Voices*, is founded on early reminiscences. In the *Poems by Two Brothers* appeared the following short poem, not by Tennyson, but by his brother Charles, and it is the germ of the greater poem:—

"EPIGRAM.

"A saint by soldiers fetter'd lay;  
An angel took his bonds away.  
An angel put the chains on me;  
And 'tis a soldier sets me free." \*

\* "The reader must suppose a young man deeply in love, but persuaded by a friend in the army to lead a military life, and forget the charms of the siren who cramped the vigour of his soul."

This subject—the vigour of the soul cramped by love—had always an attraction for Tennyson as a theme for poetical treatment. He employed it in



*The Two Voices* in the following lines ; and he again used it, as we shall see, in *Maud* :—

“ When, wide in soul, and bold of tongue,  
Among the tents I paused and sung,  
The distant battle flashed and rung.

“ I sung the joyful paen clear,  
And sitting, burnish’d without fear  
The brand, the buckler, and the spear—

“ Waiting to strive a happy strife,  
To war with falsehood to the knife,  
And not to lose the good of life—

“ Some hidden principle to move,  
To put together, part and prove,  
And mete the bounds of hate and love--

“ As far as might be, to carve out  
Free space for every human doubt,  
That the whole mind might orb about—

“ To search through all I felt or saw,  
The springs of life, the depths of awe,  
And reach the law within the law :

“ At least not rotting like a weed,  
But, having sown some generous seed,  
Fruitful of further thought and deed,

“ To pass, when Life her light withdraws  
Not void of righteous self-applause,  
Not in a merely selfish cause—

“ In some good cause, not in mine own,  
To perish, wept for, honour’d, known,  
And like a warrior overthrown ;

“ Whose eyes are dim with glorious tears,  
When, soil'd with noble dust, he hears  
His country's war-song thrill his ears :

“ Then dying of a mortal stroke,  
What time the foeman's line is broke,  
And all the war is rolled in smoke.”

Byronism had been one of Tennyson's passions in his early years; it awoke about the time when he wrote *Locksley Hall*. The pessimistic view of life had been given expression to in several masterpieces of European literature before the appearance of Tennyson's poem. *The Sorrows of Young Werther* is one of the most beautiful pieces of prose ever penned. Written in Goethe's twenty-third year, it breathes the aspirations of youth and that vague longing after a better state of things than that existing under the present constitution of society, in which an aristocracy rules by influence, if not by statesmanship, over the destinies of men of genius even, who are the flower of mankind. The book, written as a series of letters, exhales the finest poetical sentiments, interblent with a subtle pessimism of the most gloomy kind.

Chateaubriand's *René* is the second monument erected by genius to the modern spirit of revolt and pessimism, giving voice to what became known as the Malady of the Century—the vague longing of a soul for expansion into the infinite, born of brooding and reverie and the too great indulgence of imagination. René is driven away from his native place to wander aimlessly among the savages of North

America, where he finds an asylum for his grief, burying himself, though alive, among the primeval forests. Even here, however, he is a spirit of unrest, and the natives listen to the story of his life with sympathetic attention, and try to minister to his hopeless affliction. The hero thus depicted wandering in the forests of the New Continent in search of a happiness he cannot find elsewhere is an indictment of European civilisation, and a world-wide problem is involved in the cure of René's mental disease.

Byron's *Lara* is a more personal creation than either *Werther* or *René*. We feel that the author has been less able to detach himself from his own imagining than in the case of Goethe and Chateaubriand; and yet *Lara* is the representation of a type as well as *Werther* and *René*. Its mental disturbance, however, is more temperamental to the author than belonging to the time. Yet Byron's age devoured such objective incarnations of something of its own subjectivity, for the Corsair, the hero of *The Island*, Childe Harold, and Manfred are only duplications of the original *Lara*, and they were all popular because the symptoms of a spirit of revolt which had "shook the world." It was such poems that affected the young men of the early decades of the nineteenth century, and made Tennyson in his youth, on hearing of the death of Byron, carve on a rock the words "Byron is dead." (*Mem.* i. 4.)

Tennyson's *Locksley Hall* is the fourth of these monumental masterpieces of the Poetry of Revolt. Its relationship to its predecessors is obvious. It grew in Tennyson's mind out of the Epigram of his

brother Charles, uniting its hero with the character of the hero of *The Two Voices*. But what in *The Two Voices* was an inadequate representation of the spirit of discontent became in *Locksley Hall* a grand, artistic conception, full of the fire and melodious utterance of youth, youth at war with the world, groping vaguely into a Future for an ideal state of society in which the conventions that bar the progress of young manhood and its ideals are to be non-present. • The hero, consequently, plunges about in all directions for his Utopia ; he is a combination of Werther and René and Lara. The same poignancy of feeling of the diseased enthusiast which animates these three creations rings through the verse of Tennyson ; the palpitations of the heart of the incurable sentimentalist are felt in *Locksley Hall* even more deeply than in its predecessors. This is emphasized by the beauty of the verse. The long sonorous swing of its line, its liveliness and its fine imagery contribute to make *Locksley Hall* one of the most memorable poems of the nineteenth century ; in it the poet has perfectly articulated what he intended to say.

But while *Locksley Hall* is all this and an important contribution to the Poetry of Revolt, it is more ; differing from its predecessors in looking forward to a time when the hopes of youth may be realised in some practical ideal. It does not propose with *René* to plunge into the primeval forests and find there a refuge from unrest, though its hero dallies with this as a possible solution of his discontent. It has a large and semi-hopeful outlook on the Future ; it

sees beyond the time when great armies may be fighting in the Central Blue, and when the nations have been able to adjust their jealousies and differences by a Federation of the World, establishing permanent peace and abolishing war altogether. In respect of which, *Locksley Hall* is as much a forerunner of the poetry of hope as the last poetical masterpiece of the literature of despair. It mediates between the two kinds, and it becomes European and cosmopolitan. It is one of the few poems in which Tennyson, always strongly national in his feeling, adds something to the poetry of the higher aspirations of Western Civilisation. In writing it he allied himself with the great intellectualists of the modern movement, the object of which is only yet dimly discerned, but which, we believe, is wheeling to some definite Good, called by Tennyson the Increasing Purpose of the Ages that is ripening with the suns.

While *Locksley Hall* is the finished masterpiece of the 1842 volumes, there is one poem in the collection which may be said to be its rival, both because of its innate excellence and because of the place it holds in Tennyson's career as a poet. The *Morte D'Arthur*, although a fragment, is one of those pieces of poetry of the utmost importance in literature. It is the closing canto of a great poem, which at the time of publication indicated that its author had imagined something of what should precede it, but was unable to carry out, yet into the spirit of which he had thoroughly entered. None of the idylls of the King afterwards written surpassed in the glory of its diction the first instalment of Tennyson's great life

task.<sup>a</sup> The picture of the dying king sending Sir Bedivere on his thrice repeated mission to throw away Excalibur and the weird suggestiveness of the moonlit scenery in which the whole is enacted is one of the most impressive things in epic poetry. That Tennyson should afterwards spend the most precious hours of the greater part of his life in writing up to the *Morte D'Arthur* was only natural.

## CHAPTER IV.

### "IN MEMORIAM."

THE success of the *Poems* of 1842 was immediate and unbounded. The poet who had for ten years been shy of public criticism showed how unfounded was his timidity at adverse opinion. Every poet of originality is at first assailed for the peculiarities always accompanying real merit. Tennyson by his self-culture had in part cured himself of the affectations of his early pieces, and had thrown aside those poems which he regarded as incurably bad. He rejected forty-five of the *Poems* of 1830 and 1832-3 in the volumes of 1842. He was now recognised, at the age of thirty-three, the first poet in England, with the reservation, of course, of Wordsworth, who was now practically silent. This was surely a great achievement, and justified all the expectations which had been entertained of him by his Cambridge friends, who now shared in the triumph.

Edward FitzGerald had read most of the poems in MS., and retained throughout his life a passionate admiration of the volumes of 1842; so much so, indeed, that he was unjust to Tennyson's work put out after this. Fine old mastiff that he was, he must ever afterwards have a growl at any successor of the

1842 *Poems*. FitzGerald was right in a sense. Scarcely any volume of miscellaneous poems issued by an English poet can show so much beauty of conception and versatility of talent as Tennyson's poems of 1842; but there are some blemishes which Tennyson latterly overcame as far as his natural tendency to over-melodiousness and creamy smoothness would allow him.

Tennyson about this time became acquainted with Carlyle, now the author of *The French Revolution* (1837), *Sartor Resartus* (1838), *Lectures on Heroes* (1841), and he was busy with *Past and Present* (1843). His reception of the volume and his description of Tennyson at this period are worth recording. Carlyle really never understood poetry and the mechanism of verse technique. In spite of his general appreciation of the poetry of Goethe and Burns, he had no sense of melody. His criticisms of poetry when he tries to come to detail fly off into the vague; and what he does not comprehend in the thinking of a logical metaphysician he labels "Bottled Moonshine," or some other unsatisfactory phrase, as if that settled the matter. Here, however, is his description of Tennyson in 1842, written to Emerson, "Alfred is one of the few British and foreign figures (a not increasing number I think) who are and remain beautiful to me, a true human soul, or some authentic approximation thereto, to whom your own soul can say *Brother!* One of the finest looking men in the world. A great shock of rough, dusky dark hair; bright, laughing, hazel eyes; massive, aquiline face, most massive, yet most



delicate ; of sallow brown complexion, almost Indian looking, clothes cynically loose, free-and-easy, smokes infinite tobacco. His voice is musical, metallic, fit for loud laughter and piercing wail, and all that may lie between ; speech and speculation free and plenteous ; I do not meet in these late decades such company over a pipe ! We shall see what he will grow to." (*Mem.* i. 187-8.)

Carlyle did not become intimate with Tennyson till 1842, "being naturally prejudiced against one whom everyone was praising, and praising for a sort of poetry which he despised. But directly he saw and heard the man, he knew there was a man to deal with and took pains to cultivate him ; assiduous in exhorting him to leave Verse and Rhyme, and to apply his genius to Prose and Work." (Edward FitzGerald, quoted in *Mem.* i. 188.)

This being Carlyle's appreciation of the man, we now turn to his view of Tennyson's *Poems* of 1842. "I have just been reading your poems ; I have read certain of them over again, and mean to read them over and over till they become my poems ; this fact, with the inferences that lie in it, is of such emphasis in *me*, I cannot keep it to myself, but must needs acquaint you too with it. If you knew what my relation has been to the thing called English *Poetry* for many years back, you would think such fact almost surprising ! Truly it is long since in any English Book, Poetry or Prose, I have felt the pulse of a real man's heart as I do in this same. A right, valiant, true fighting, victorious heart ; strong as a lion's, yet gentle, loving and full of music ; what I

call a genuine singer's heart ! there are tones of the nightingale ; low murmurs as of wood-doves at summer noon ; everywhere a noble sound as of the free winds and leafy woods. The sunniest glow of Life dwells in that soul, chequered duly with dark streaks from night and Hades ; everywhere one feels as if all were fill'd with yellow glowing sunlight, some glorious golden Vapour ; from which form after form bodies itself ; naturally *golden* forms. In one word, there seems to be a note of *The Eternal Melodies* in this man ; for which let all other men be thankful and joyful ! " (*Mem.* i. 213.)

Tennyson had to be content with this kind of Carlylese rhapsody somewhat akin to what the sage of Chelsea had asserted elsewhere about the poetic work of Goethe and Burns and the prose of Jean Paul ; and it formed a bond of union between them leading to repeated long smokes of the infinite tobacco, at some of which silence was reported to be in the ascendant. The alliance between German Transcendentalism and Neo-Romanticism was never deep or cordial, and Tennyson had to put up with Carlyle's general recognition mingled with some good humoured banter regarding the futility of writing in verse what could be, according to Carlyle, better done in prose. Carlyle even went the length of good-humouredly declaring that his poetical friend was "a life-guardsman spoilt by making poetry" (*Mem.* i. 188). He could, in fact, appreciate Tennyson as a man, but had neither insight into his poetry nor a genuine love of it.

The poems of 1842 were appreciated in America as

well as in England. Hawthorne, Margaret Fuller, Emerson, Edgar Allan Poe were enthusiastic about them. Ferdinand Freiligrath, the German poet and translator of Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, wrote to Mary Howitt in October, 1842: "Tennyson is indeed a true poet, though perhaps sometimes a little too transcendental. *Mariana in the Moated Grange*, and some other of his poems are superb, and breathe such a sweet and dreamy melancholy that I cannot cease to read and admire them." (*Mem.* i. 190.)

Spedding reviewed the Poems in the *Edinburgh Review* for April 1843. He said: "The decade during which Mr. Tennyson has remained silent has wrought a great improvement. The handling in his later pieces is much lighter and freer; the interest deeper and purer; there is more humanity with less imagery and drapery; a closer adherence to truth; a greater reliance for effect upon the simplicity of nature. Moral and spiritual traits of character are more dwelt upon, in place of external scenery and circumstance. He addresses himself more to the heart and less to the ear and eye." (*Mem.* i. 190.)

Tennyson was acquainted with Samuel Rogers, now the oldest living poet of England with a reputation, the "dean of English poets," as he has been called. Rogers would praise *Locksley Hall*, and would say "Shakespeare could not have done it better." "I should have thought," observed Tennyson, "that such a poem as *Dora* was more in Rogers' line; perhaps it was too much in his line. *Dora*, being the tale of a noble simple country girl, had to be told in the simplest possible poetical language,

and therefore was one of the poems which gave most trouble." *Ulysses*, said Tennyson, "was written soon after Arthur Hallam's death, and gave my feeling about the need of going forward and braving the struggle of life perhaps more simply than anything in *In Memoriam*." (*Mem.* i. 195-6.)

Sara Coleridge, writing to Edward Moxon at the close of 1842, said: "What I have read of the second volume will sustain the author's reputation, which is much to say. The Epic is what might have been expected, not epical at all but very beautiful, in Tennyson's old manner. *The Gardener's Daughter* is most highly wrought, and still more to be admired I think than the *Morte D'Arthur*" (*Mem.* i. 215). Aubrey De Vere and Dickens and many others wrote appreciatively of the Poems.

The career of the poet was checked at this time by an unfortunate transaction which swept away what money he had. A Dr. Allen of the neighbourhood of Beech Hill, where the Tennysons were living, had induced Tennyson and his family to invest their savings in an undertaking for executing wood carving by machinery. The ostensible object of the Patent Company was to make wood carving so cheaply as to put it within the reach of the multitude. The combination of philanthropy and commercialism necessitated the raising of capital by the Doctor, who was either an enthusiast, deluded by his own oversanguine temper without the necessary business capacities to manage such a concern, or, as Tennyson afterwards thought him, a man of unprincipled designs determined on raising capital by hook or by

crook wherever he could find it. From the information vouchsafed by the *Memoir* (pp. 216-228), it is, of course, hard to decide upon the merits or moral character of the projector of "The Patent Decorative Carving and Sculpture Company;" but the result was a complete failure of the project, which swept away the whole of Tennyson's money at a time when some tangible reality of success was most desirable. Tennyson's intended marriage with Emily Sellwood was thus delayed indefinitely and afterwards abandoned. The backbone of this misfortune, however, was broken by an unregrettable incident. Edward Lushington, Tennyson's brother-in-law, had taken the precaution to insure Dr. Allen's life to cover a part of the capital sunk in the wood-carving business, and Dr. Allen died within a year of the insurance being effected.

Tennyson broke down in health under the strain of his loss of money, and was for a time under one of those clouds of melancholy which more than once overshadowed his career; and we find him in Cheltenham in July 1844 undergoing the hydropathic cure, in which he was a firm believer. Tennyson gradually recovered, but whether it was due to the water cure is not definitely ascertainable. It is more likely that Time was the physician.

The next year of Tennyson's life, 1845, was the year in which he received his pension of £200. It was principally through the advocacy of Hallam and Monckton Milnes that the poet was offered the pension. Carlyle, too, did a service to Tennyson in the securing of it which must be placed to his

credit. •The following account of how the Chelsea sage characteristically went about matters is related in *The Life of Lord Houghton* by Sir T. Wemyss Reid. The incident is given as Monckton Milnes told it—

“‘Richard Milnes,’ said Carlyle one day, withdrawing his pipe from his mouth, as they were seated together in the little house in Cheyne Row, ‘when are you going to get that pension for Alfred Tennyson?’ ‘My dear Carlyle,’ responded Milnes, ‘the thing is not so easy as you seem to suppose. What will my constituents say if I do get the pension for Tennyson? They know nothing about him or his poetry, and they will probably think he is some poor relation of my own, and that the whole affair is a job.’ Solemn and emphatic was Carlyle’s response. ‘Richard Milnes, on the Day of Judgment, when the Lord asks you why you didn’t get that pension for Alfred Tennyson, it will not do to lay the blame on your constituents; it is you that will be damned.’” (*Mem.* i. 225.) This emphatic advocacy made Monckton Milnes stir in the matter. Sir Robert Peel had the nomination of the recipient of a literary pension, and the question was whether Sheridan Knowles or Tennyson should have it. Peel knew nothing of either. Houghton said he made Sir Robert read Tennyson’s *Ulysses*, on which the pension was granted to the poet. (*Mem.* i. 225.)

Tennyson meantime paid one of his visits to London, and his old friend Savile Morton mentions in one

of his letters that he had "come across Tennyson. We looked out some Latin translations of his poems by Cambridge men, and read some poems of Leigh Hunt's, and some of Theocritus and Virgil. It is delightful to have a passage picked out for one to admire by him. Seeing through his eyes much enlarges one's view. He has the power of impressing you with the greatness of what he admires and bringing out its meaning. I had no idea Virgil could ever sound so fine as it did by his reading." (*Mem.* i. 222.)

This scrap of information regarding Tennyson's interest in Virgil and Theocritus about this time casts some light upon his career as poet. Virgil was always a favourite of his, and he afterwards described Virgil in ever-memorable words—

" Landscape lover, lord of language  
 more than he that sang the Works and Days,  
 . . . . .  
 Thou that singest wheat and woodland  
 tilth and vineyard, hive and horse and herd ;  
 All the charm of all the Muses  
 often flowering in a lonely word ;  
 Poet of the happy Tityrus  
 piping underneath his beechen bowers ;  
 Poet of the poet-satyr  
 whom the laughing shepherd bound with flowers ;  
 I salute thee, Mantovana,  
 I that loved thee since my day began,  
 Wielder of the stateliest measure  
 ever moulded by the lips of man.

This description by Tennyson shows what he valued highly in Virgil was his pastoral landscape painting.

The *Idylls* of Theocritus and the *Georgics* and the *Bucolics* of Virgil were closely studied by Tennyson. Commentators and editors of the poet have often pointed out his indebtedness to the two Pastoral Poets of Antiquity.

The study of Virgil and Theocritus had already influenced Tennyson's verse in the composition of the poems of the 1842 volumes.

"This way and that dividing the swift mind"

in the *Morte D'Arthur*, for instance, is a Virgilian echo (*Ænid* iv. 285). Echoes of Theocritus are found in *The Gardener's Daughter* and elsewhere in the volumes of 1842.

Tennyson was now engaged on the poems that constitute *In Memoriam*, and his study of Virgil and Theocritus led to the restrained style of the short swallow-flights of song he had composed on the death of Hallam. He chose, in writing these, a verse which confined him better than blank verse or irregular stanzas. The short four-line stanza, the first and fourth rhyming, with a couplet between, is admirably suited to the half-pensive, introspective, half-descriptive method by which he gave forth his imaginings on Hallam, and on human life, destiny, and science and modern doubt. The stanza, discovered by himself, had been employed by Ben Jonson before him, but its full capabilities had not been shown by any former versifier. The stanza suited Tennyson's tone of mind admirably; it was the appropriate measure for the dreamy contemplator, withdrawn from the active life of his age, but



hearing of its doings and trying to reconcile the intellectual problems disturbing it.

Tennyson was not one of those who could converse very fluently except among his more immediate acquaintances. At the club of the "Apostles" we see him sitting in a musing mood, half listening to the discourse of the others, half dreaming over his own thoughts, yet emitting, when called upon, short remarks summing up his estimate of the argument, showing he had re-cogitated the subject thoroughly. He was not one of the great talkers like Johnson, Coleridge, or Madame De Staël. Shy and reserved to strangers, he was shy and reserved even to a circle of friends. As the circle lessened his frankness increased, and it was perhaps to Arthur Hallam only that he poured forth all the fulness of his rich and glowing mind. Hallam had thus acquired a strange dominion over his imagination; he became Tennyson's second self, his best self revealed. The short swallow-flights of song written after Arthur's death are characteristic of the solitary-amid-the-multitude that Tennyson always was. They are often answers, versified and put into beautiful language, to some of the doubtings that had been given expression to by members of the "Apostles" Club. They have the meditative pathos of the plangent poetry of regret which is so characteristic of the nineteenth century. They are highly academic in the cast of their thought, in the turn of their phrases. They leave the impression that a deep and musing thinker has restrained himself within narrow limits to be clear and to be understood by

the average mind. Tennyson is terse without being too epigrammatic; he does not force his general truths, deduced from the local situation, too prominently upon us. His axioms fall off him as if by accident, naturally, without any undue straining to be among the sayings of "the masters who know." Carefully elaborated as they are, they do not importune to be heard so aggressively as the axioms of Pope.

The expression of friendship for a man in terms of the affection of a passionate love for woman or something closely akin to it, occurs in several poets, Virgil, Milton, Shakespeare, as well as Tennyson. The second Eclogue of Virgil in which Corydon, who seems to represent Virgil himself—pursues Alexis, may mean nothing more than the expression of an ambition at a certain time of Virgil's early life to reach the highest in the poetic art. Alexis is only the ideal poet, the same figure as Goethe's "Boy-Charioteer" in the pageant of the Second Act of the Second Part of *Faust*, and symbolizes the faultless poetry which every young poet longs for. Goethe uses the character in his *Alexis and Dora*; but in order to make his own representation of the pursuit of the Ideal Poetry quite modern, he symbolizes Ideal Poetry as a female (Dora), but employs Alexis as the pursuer in order to preserve a continuity with the meaning of Virgil's original conception. This, too, is the reason why Goethe writes the poem as an idyll. Milton's affection for Edward King, the mourned one of *Lycidas*, has also a touch of the symbolical in it. Lycidas is not only Edward King, but the ideal man

who "could build the lofty rhyme," and the poem is written as a pastoral eclogue accordingly in imitation of Virgil, the author of *Corydon and Alexis* and the *Death of Daphnis* (Bucolics ii. and v.). Shakespeare's sonnets are one of the curiosities and puzzles of literature. Their adulation of a male subject borders upon pure Paganism unless we attribute a symbolical meaning to some passages in which the poet was recalling Virgil's *Corydon and Alexis*. The Sonnets commence with a glorification of youth (Sonnets 2-4) which is continued throughout the sequence (11, 15, 54, 98), and Perfection is also brought into the picture as one of the great realities (Sonnets 15, 18-21, 91, 98, 99), against which Time lays siege and brings about the decay of all beauty, freshness, and youth. The poet represents himself, in order to be able to poeticise on this constantly recurring theme, as in the autumn of man's age :-

"That time of year thou may'st in me behold  
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang  
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold.

. . . . .

In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire  
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie."

Youth and Perfection are one (Sonnet 15). Shakespeare is perfectly cognizant that the adulation he is lavishing on his friend will be misunderstood by after times (Sonnet 17), but he is painting a combination of the beauty of a strong man and a lovely woman (Sonnet 20). This is the Master-mistress of the writer's passion; and the writer is a poet (Sonnets

29, 32, 59, and 76), who has created a work of art in his picture (Sonnet 24). His ideal thus created haunts him day and night (Sonnets 27, 28). And his ideal is something quite new, unknown to the Nine Muses: it is the work of the Tenth Muse,

"ten times more in worth  
Than those old nine which rhymers invoke" (38),

and the poet is sick of old themes, now threadbare, and consequently writes about an actual man (Sonnets 76, 78), but in his portraiture of his friend he *invents* (Sonnet 79). A rival poet is also eulogising his friend (Sonnet 80), but it is the writer of the sonnets who is to immortalise him (Sonnet 81), and it is Everlasting Youth that is thus sung (Sonnets 104, 106, 108). And the poet identifies his friend or rather his virtues with all the beauties of Nature (Sonnets 113, 114). A defiance of Time to destroy his poetical creation (Sonnet 123), which is eternal (Sonnets 124, 125), and an address to the creation of his Fancy, which he addresses as "Lovely Boy" (Sonnet 126), concludes the sequence. ∪

Some knowledge of these predecessors of Tennyson's *In Memoriam* is necessary to appreciate his memorial verses on Arthur Hallam. The glorification of manly beauty as an ideal, pictured in a friend of the writer, has invariably been the outcome of an age of doubt and denial, and when the feeling was widely entertained that the verities of religion founded on the character and teaching of a founder of religion in the Past was being called in question. And this is what occurred in the case of Tennyson.

subordinates himself to his friend. In 85 Hallam is throned with

“The great Intelligences fair,”

a reference, according to Professor Churton Collins, to Dante's *Convito*, ii. 5; rather, I should think, to Spenser's—

“The Spirits and Intelligences fayre”

of the *Tears of the Muses* (Urania).

The order in which the earliest Elegies were composed is given in the *Memoir*, p. 109, and Professor Churton Collins has admirably summarised how the poem was written and put together:—

“When *In Memoriam* was given to the world, it appeared as a connected work, and not as a series of fragmentary lyrics. But to make it a connected work was not Tennyson's original intention. The sections were written, he says, at many different places, and as the phases of his intercourse with Hallam came to his memory and suggested them. ‘I did not write them with any view of weaving them into a whole, or for publication, until I found that I had written so many.’ The sections composing the poem were written at intervals between the spring of 1834 and 1850, the year of its publication—‘some in Lincolnshire, some in London, Essex, Gloucestershire, Wales, anywhere where I happened to be.’ (*Life*, vol. i. p. 305.) The *Life* enables us to assign dates, or approximate dates, to many of the sections. Those earliest in order of composition were 9, 30, 31, 85, 28 (*Life*, vol. i. p. 109).

Section 98 must have been written in the spring of 1835 (*Ibid.*, p. 148). Sections 100-103 refer to the removal of the Tennysons from Somersby in 1837, and 104-5 to their settlement at High Beech, Epping Forest. Section 86 was written at Barmouth in 1839 (*Ibid.*, p. 313), and possibly some of the other sections in the same key; see 88, 89, 91, 95, 96, 121, 122. By Christmas 1841 the poem had made much progress; for Edmund Lushington says, 'The number of memorial poems had rapidly increased,' adding that he heard for the first time 6 and 51 (*Ibid.*, p. 202-3). We also learn that 'the sections about evolution,' presumably 54, 55, 56, 118, 120, had been written before the publication of Chambers's *Vestiges of Creation*, in 1844 (*Ibid.*, p. 223). In the summer of 1845 further progress had been made, and the Epilogue had been written (*Ibid.*, p. 203). Section 127 appears to refer to the events of 1848. If Canon Rawnsley be correct (see *Memories of the Tennysons*, p. 121), 121 was composed shortly before the poems were published. The fragmentary way in which *In Memoriam* was composed is indicated in the titles originally applied to it by Tennyson. It is sometimes spoken of as 'Memorial Poems,' sometimes as 'the Elegies,' sometimes as 'Fragments of an Elegy.'"

The Elegies Nos. 54, 55, and 56, in which Tennyson reasons on the Law of Evolution, and in which Nature figures as "so careful of the type,"

"So careful of the type she seems,  
So careless of the single life,"

are founded on a passage in Senancour's *Qüermann* (Letter 45). "General laws are no doubt very grand laws, and I should willingly immolate at their shrine a year of my life, say two or even ten years, but my entire being is too much; it may be nothing to Nature, but it is all to me. . . . These laws of the type, this care of the species, this carelessness of individuals, this hurry of existence is very hard for us who are individuals. I admire that providence which chisels everything on the large scale; but ah fie, how is man toppled down amidst the chips, and how we cling to the belief that we are something!" Such reflections were common in French literature during the first decade of the nineteenth century. The following passage from the *Genius of Christianity* on the solidarity of the Human Race is an instance—"Sur des sociétés qui meurent sans cesse, une société vit sans cesse; les hommes tombent, l'homme reste debout, enrichi de tout ce que ses devanciers lui ont transmis, couronné de toutes les lumières, orné de tous les présents des âges; géant que croît toujours, toujours, toujours, et dont le front montant dans les cieux ne s'arrêtera qu'à la hauteur du trône de l'Éternel." (End of First Part.) There may also be a reference, as Professor Churton Collins suggests, to Spenser's description of Nature (*Mutability*, vii. 5-6), in which Nature is represented as hidden under a veil, but no one can say whether she is Man or Woman, Lion, or a Thing of Beauty. Or Tennyson had perhaps Coleridge's poem called *Human Life* in mind in his reflections on the Larger Hope, and a passage in the *Aids to Reflection* decidedly, in Elegy

120. Tennyson, too, must have been cognisant of Spenser's conception of Creation as the work of Love, in *Colin Clouts Come Home Again*.

"So Love is lord of all the world by right,  
And rules the creatures by his powerful saw."

Hence Tennyson's

"Who trusted God was love indeed,  
And Love Creation's final law."

Tennyson was less dependent on modern scientific theories for his cosmology than some of his commentators suppose. His views on Evolution were, as Professor Churton Collins has remarked, written before the publication of *The Vestiges of Creation* (1844), and he preceded Darwin by years. Such speculations were "in the air" as we say; but Tennyson took his notions about them from his favourite poets and prose writers, and rounded them off into beautiful lyrical effusions. The mood of Tennyson in these semi-scientific passages of *In Memoriam* is that habitual to Chateaubriand when meditating on "the Chain of Nature" (I. Part, Book v. ch. 10), the Solidarity of the Human Race, Progress, and the Immortality of the Soul, or when protesting against Reason being employed to the exclusion of imagination in the ascertainment of truth, and when holding out a Larger Hope in spite of the black shadows of creation. The religious emotion awakened by the distant sounding of church bells (Part I., Book vi. 1)—the ridicule of Madame De Staël—is also beautifully paralleled in *In Memoriam*.



in the Christmas poem which closes the whole argument, No. 106,

“Ring out the Old, ring in the New.”

The Epilogue, as we have seen, was written in 1845; and we may presume that about this time the series of Elegies on Arthur Hallam came to be regarded by Tennyson and his intimate friends as a new Theodicy, fitted to cope with the doubts of the age. Like Arthur Hugh Clough, who wrote about the same time, and Matthew Arnold, who wrote a little later, Tennyson is one of the poets of modern doubt. He has given voice to the misgivings of the English mind during the theological ferment which went on between 1833 and 1850. They were the poets of Intellectual Anguish, but Tennyson was the one who struck a triumphant note. His “Ring out the Old, ring in the New” is the language of Hope and Progress. He holds out this Hope by having an ideal for the Future, not yet realised in his own day, but which he expects to be realised in after generations. This he calls the “Christ that is To Be.”

The origination of this conception in his mind can be traced. Tennyson between 1832 and 1842 re-handled his poem called “The Sleeping Beauty,” published in the 1830 volume. One of the general results of the scientific treatment of subjects, historical and political, was to dispel the old conception of a Golden Age or State of Nature, as the seventeenth century philosophers and Pope and Rousseau called it. Although this favourite phantasy

of the poets had gone with the failure of the French Revolution to realise it in actual life, Tennyson did not give up the dream of a Golden Age. He believed that the Golden Age is one of the permanent articles of the Poets' creed, but if it did not have an existence in the Past, it will be realised, in spite of the failure of the French Revolution, in the Future. The very fact that the Golden Age has been so deeply cherished by poetic souls means that some day it must come true. What since the days of Hesiod we have been supposing was in the Ancient World lies in the Future. *We* are the "Ancients of the Earth," the Heirs of all the Ages, the generation that is in the foremost files of Time. Here was a volte-face, a turning from East to West, completely altering the point of view; and hence Tennyson, unable in 1830 to make anything more than a beautiful Keatsian picture of his *Sleeping Beauty*, expanded it into a parable or legend of the Poetic Ideal, its meaning left in the vague. Hence the fooling of the conclusion, and the question—

"And is there any question shut  
Within the moral of the rose?"

*The Day Dream* was written in 1835; *The Golden Year*, a sequel to it, was added to the *Poems* of 1842 in the 1846 edition. In this piece Tennyson holds that the Golden Age of the Poets is ever imminent,

"This same grand year is ever at our doors."

This poem gives Tennyson's philosophy of the Human Ideal; but during the composition of *In*

*Memoriam* Tennyson abandoned the conception of a Fated Færy Prince, and substituted in lieu of it the more churchly ideal of "The Christ that is To Be," which consequently closes the argument of his Theodicy. Tennyson now believed that "the spirit of Christ would still grow from more to more in the roll of the ages

'Till each man find his own in all men's good,  
And all men work in noble brotherhood,'    .

when Christianity without bigotry will triumph, when the controversies of creeds shall have vanished." (*Memoir*, i. 326.)

The principal Theodicies preceding Tennyson's *In Memoriam* are Pascal's *Thoughts*, Pope's *Essay on Man*, and Chateaubriand's *Genius of Christianity*; and he had also access to Arthur Hallam's fragmentary work *Theodicæa Novissima* on which to work. Professor Churton Collins has pointed out his indebtedness to the latter.

Pope's *Essay on Man* is the finest philosophical poem in our language. In spite of the detraction to which it has been subjected by critics of the nineteenth century—Mark Pattison, for instance—it remains the model poem of its kind. It was the only English poem which enjoyed a European reputation before the works of Shakespeare became known throughout the world. It was the favourite poem of Kant, and many other eminent thinkers of the eighteenth century, and numerous translations were made. Its style is the most perfect of any poem of the same length in heroic couplets; its

symmetry of design—the beautiful evolution of its idea—has never been surpassed except perhaps in the *Œdipus Rex* and the *Ancient Mariner*. The complaint that *The Essay on Man* is not a complete system of philosophy is futile. A Theodicy in verse cannot be a complete system of philosophy; it must, on the contrary, be a short epitome of the philosophies regnant at the time at which it is written, mediating between the contending systems of thought and drawing out an optimistic conclusion from the consideration of the attitudes of the thinkers of the age. Without doing this a Theodicy would be abortive. And this is just what Pope has done, and very well done in *The Essay on Man*, whether he absorbed his views from Bolingbroke and others of his contemporaries, or framed them from his own observation and recognition of the prevalent opinions.

Tennyson in utilising his *Elegies on Arthur Hallam* to weave them into a Theodicy had some difficulty in combining them into a united whole, but he accomplished this somewhat satisfactorily, although he gave his work a double ending. In Tennyson's day the poet had to navigate between the Old Theology and the New, between Agnosticism and Science and Humanism and the piety of the Oxford Movement, and find an optimistic conclusion or egress out of the *impasse* created by the block of their combined contradictions. This Tennyson does by postulating that in the immediate future of humanity we shall be granted a new glimpse of guiding truth called "The Christ that is To Be"

(106), which will be the outcome of all the intellectual anguish of Honest Doubt, which is but the birth-throes of its advent.

This is a far finer ending to a Theodicy than that of *The Essay on Man*. In Pope's age there was no new theology to lend its help to such a solution of the philosophic difficulties of the time, and consequently Pope's masterpiece winds up in the absolute optimism which became the ridicule of Voltaire in *Candide*.

This was the first conclusion of Tennyson, but he enlarged his design by the addition of the remaining twenty-five pieces and the epilogue describing the marriage of his sister with Edward Lushington. Here he echoes Pope in section 128, where Pope's

" All Nature is but Art unknown to Thee "

becomes

" I see a part  
That all, as in some piece of art,  
Is toil, co-operant to an end."

Having traversed all the phases of grief and intellectual anguish, the poet closes with a happy strain and the sound of marriage bells, and winds up the poem with the belief, already given expression to in *Locksley Hall*, in a divine event

" To which the whole Creation moves,"

Tennyson thus constitutes his poem into a new *Divina Commedia*, for he had Dante in mind in this second close of his argument. Dante's Pilgrim

through the Shades, it will be remembered, when he emerges out of the *Inferno*

“ Again beheld the stars.”

At the close of the *Purgatorio* he has been made

“ Pure and made apt for mounting to the stars,”

and at the end of the *Paradiso* he felt the Divine Will

“ That moves the sun in heaven and all the stars.”

And Tennyson's pilgrim through the shades of Modern Doubt comes to perceive, contemplating the starry evening after the wedding day,

“ The one far-off Divine Event

“ To which the whole Creation moves.”

In *In Memoriam* Tennyson thus did for his age what Pope had done for the first half of the eighteenth century, and what Dante had done for the Mædieval World.

Whether *In Memoriam* has a “wasting hold on life,” as one of Tennyson's best critics, Professor Churton Collins, asserts, need not be discussed in full. Doubtless, as time goes on, and the disbeliefs and doubts for which it was intended to be a salve, have given way to newer forms of perplexity, its solution like that of the *Essay on Man* of the problems with which it deals, will be less satisfactory. Already we are beginning to discover, as was done in the case of Pope, that *In Memoriam* is not a complete philosophy, and its unity as a

poem is loudly called in question. As a work of art it cannot boast of the inward cohesion even of the *Essay on Man*. But it has the charm of which the *Essay on Man* is wanting. Its lingerings o'er the beauty of English home-life, home scenery, and the many single poems which can be extracted from it on the solace of grief and consolation in distress must always commend it to a certain public not primarily concerned with its theological argument. The following sections of this nature may be specified: numbers 20, 22, 27, 28, 30, 36, 40, 54, 69, 91, 115.

## CHAPTER V.

### TENNYSON THE POET OF ENGLISH CULTURE.

TENNYSON in 1846 went along with Edward Moxon, the publisher, to Switzerland. Travelling viâ Ostend, Bruges, Liege, where he met two sons of Sir Robert Peel, they arrived at Cologne on 4th August. They stayed at the Cologne Hotel, "rooms overlooking moonlit Rhine, hotel full of light and festival, pillar-ing its lights in the quiet water, bridge of boats, three steamers lying quietly below windows" (*Mem.* i. 231). The Cathedral was deemed "splendid, but too narrow for its length." The travellers next visited Mainz, Worms, Mannheim, Kehl, Basle, and thence to Lucerne, where he met an agreeable young lady to whom he quoted Goethe, and she spouted *William Tell* in return. He ascended the Righi, and had a distant view of the Jungfrau "as if delicately pencilled." He pronounced Lauterbrunnen and the Bernese Alps the best 'things in the tour. He met Dickens at Lausanne.

Nothing of importance occurred in Tennyson's life during the years 1846-1850 except the writing and publication of *The Princess* and *In Memoriam*. The Tennysons were now located at Cheltenham, where he lived with his mother and family. Here he made



some new acquaintances, Dobson, afterwards Principal of Cheltenham College; Boyd, afterwards Dean of Exeter; Foxton, author of *Popular Christianity*; Sydney Dobell, the poet; Dr. Acworth; Rashdall, Vicar of Malvern; Reece; and Frederick Robertson, at this time Boyd's curate, but soon to become the genius of the Broad Church movement. The Tennysons lived at Bellevue House, St. James' Square (*Mem.* i. 263). His chief companion, when in Cheltenham, for the best part of two years, was Dr. Ker's brother Alan. Both were great walkers, and few near or distant places in this beautiful neighbourhood were left unvisited by them (*Mem.* i. 264).

From Cheltenham Tennyson made expeditions to London, to see his old acquaintances. One day Savile Morton called on the poet and found Thackeray there, and a stack of shag tobacco with Homer and Miss Barrett's poems on the Table. Both Thackeray and Tennyson praised Miss Barrett, and the novelist and he became fast friends. (*Mem.* i. 266.) If Tennyson was over-susceptible to criticism, he was also abashed by flattery made to his face. One acquaintance at Cheltenham kept on assuring the poet that it was the greatest honour of his life to have met Tennyson. His answer to such praise was "Don't talk damned nonsense," the only occasion reported of Tennyson's having used strong language. (*Mem.* i. 264.)

During the visits to London he was in the habit of walking with Carlyle at night, and had to listen to the sage's diatribes against "the governments of Jackasserie which cared for commerce more than the

greatness of the empire," against the stuccoed houses of London which he characterised as "acid putrescence" and the suburbs as "black jumble of black cottages where there used to be pleasant fields." On one occasion only they nearly quarrelled when Carlyle asserted that Tennyson had talked of Poetry as "High Art," which the poet flatly contradicted (*Mem.* i. 267). These reminiscences show that Tennyson had much to bear from his philosopher friend. Among his other friends at this time were the Kembles, Coventry Patmore, Frederick Pollock, Alfred Wigan, and Macready.

Tennyson in 1848 made a trip to Cornwall, and he seems to have remained there from May to the middle of July. His time was spent in reading, bathing, and lounging about the caves of the coast near Tintagel, Land's End, and the Lizard. At one part he notes in his diary "Glorious grass-green monsters of waves" and "sat watching wave-rainbows" (*Mem.* i. 275); and again, "Saw the long green swell heaving on the black cliff, rowed into Pigeonthugo, dismal wailing of mews." These sights were afterwards utilised by Tennyson for the imagery of his *Idylls of the King*; Tennyson was extremely fond of wave-similes. A tour to Scotland was made in 1848, when he visited Loch Awe, which he pronounced grand, but was disappointed with the Pass of Brander. He steamed from Oban to Sky, did not see Loch Coruisk, on account of wet weather. Inverary and Dunkeld he pronounced lovely, but enjoyed best of all Alloway and the Land of Burns. "I made a pilgrimage thither out of love for the

great peasant; they were gathering in the wheat, and the spirit of the man mingled or seemed to mingle with all I saw. I know you do not care much for him," he wrote to Aubrey De Vere, "but I do, and hold that there never was immortal poet if he be not one." (*Mem.* i. 281).

A pleasant incident occurred in the life of Tennyson in 1849. A Lancashire man called Samuel Bamford, author of *Life of a Radical*, over seventy years of age, was fond of Tennyson's poems but unable to purchase a copy of them. He was in the habit of learning them off whenever he could lay his hands upon them, and often repeated them to his friends. Mrs. Gaskell wrote Tennyson about the old stalwart, saying she thought of giving Bamford a copy of the Poems, but suggesting it would be handsome if the copy came from Tennyson himself. This request was readily acceded to by Tennyson, whose gift was duly acknowledged by the worthy old man, overwhelmed by the consideration shown him by his favourite poet.

One of the most curious things about Tennyson was those "weird seizures" which he introduced into his poetry. About this time he wrote, "A kind of waking trance I have frequently had, quite up from boyhood, when I have been all alone. This has generally come upon me through repeating my own name two or three times to myself silently, till all at once, as it were out of the intensity of the consciousness of individuality, the individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being, and this not a confused state, but the clearest of the

clearest, the surest of the surest, the weirdest of the weirdest, utterly beyond words, where death was an almost laughable impossibility, the loss of personality (if so it were) seeming no extinction but the only true life." (*Mem.* i. 320). This curious affection resembles what Wordsworth described in his *Ode on Immortality* as

" those obstinate questionings  
Of sense and outward things ;  
Fallings from us, vanishings ;  
Blank misgivings of a creature  
Moving about in worlds not realised."

It is only highly mystical or Platonic natures who are thus affected.

Tennyson was married to Emily Sellwood on 13th June 1850. She was the daughter of Henry Sellwood, a solicitor at Horncastle, whose wife was Sarah Franklin, sister of Sir John Franklin, of Polar expedition celebrity. Emily Sellwood's mother had died in 1816 at the early age of twenty-eight, leaving three daughters, Emily, Anne, and Louisa. Emily had been born in 1813, so that she was thirty-seven at the date of her marriage with the poet, now forty-one. Charles Tennyson had married the youngest sister, Louisa Sellwood, on 24th May 1836. Emily had attended the marriage as a bridesmaid and was taken into church by Alfred Tennyson. Emily and Alfred had met as early as 1830, but they had seldom seen one another before the marriage day of Charles Tennyson and Louisa (*Mem.* i. 148). Between 1830 and 1838 Tennyson and Emily Sellwood had to postpone any thought of marriage,

Tennyson's limited means and misfortunes in monetary matters precluding union. Between 1838 and 1840 a correspondence was carried on between them; but after this there was again a long lull in the intercourse, the barrier being that

"Eternal want of pence  
Which vexes public men."

(*Mem.* i. p. 176.)

With the publication of *In Memoriam*, however, on which Tennyson was to receive a royalty, along with his pension of £200 a year, the two lovers were married at Shiplake on the Thames on 13th June. Henry Sellwood, father of the bride, Edmund and Cecilia Lushington (Tennyson's brother-in-law and sister), Charles Weld, husband of Anne Sellwood, the second sister, and a Mr. Greville Phillimore, attended the marriage. The child bridesmaids were Mary and Margaret Rawnsley and Jenny Elmhirst.

Tennyson and his bride went on their wedding tour to Weston-super-Mare, and thence to Clevedon. They saw here Arthur Hallam's resting-place, and went then to Lynton and visited the Valley of the Rocks, once the haunt of Coleridge and Wordsworth in their early friendship; thence to Exmoor, and on to Glastonbury, one of the reputed "island valleys of Avilion," where Tennyson found poetical associations doubtless afterwards incorporated in *The Idylls of the King*, Clifton, Cheltenham, where lived his mother, Patterdale and Ullswater, then to Coniston Water where they sojourned at "Trent Lodge," a villa belonging to Mrs. James Marshall, a sister of

Stephen Spring Rice. The Marshalls offered Mr. and Mrs. Tennyson Trent Lodge as a permanent home, and the Ashburtons offered a house near Croydon, but these kindnesses the Tennysons thought best to decline. Mrs. Tennyson met Carlyle for the first time at Coniston; he was staying with the Marshalls while the Tennysons were there.

Wordsworth had been dead some months, and Tennyson was appointed Poet Laureate on 19th November 1850. This office Tennyson owed chiefly to Prince Albert, who was an admirer of *In Memoriam*. A part of the Letter from Windsor Castle runs—“To make the continuance of this office in harmony with public opinion, the Queen feels that it is necessary that it should be limited to a name bearing such distinction in the literary world as to do credit to the appointment, and it was under this feeling that Her Majesty, in the first instance, offered the appointment to Mr. Rogers, who stated to Her Majesty in his reply, that the only reason which compelled him gratefully to decline Her Majesty's, gracious intention, was, that his great age rendered him unfit to receive any new office.” (*Mem.* i. 335.) Rogers, the last of the old school of poetry, was at this time practically silent, but the laureateship had been offered to him as a recognition of his long relationship with letters.

The Tennysons removed to Warminglid in Sussex for a brief time, and then to Chapel House, Montpelier Row, Twickenham. Later, in March 1851, Tennyson met the Duke of Argyll, who remained one of his most valued friends to the end. (*Mem.* i. 339.)

Biographers of Tennyson generally treat of *The Princess* before *In Memoriam*, because the first version of *The Princess* was published in 1847 and *In Memoriam* in 1850. But this is a mistake, as will be apparent when we remember that *In Memoriam* was written principally between 1835 and 1845, and *The Princess* was not commenced until 1846. Besides, *The Princess* was not finished in reality till 1851, for in the new editions of 1848, 1850, and 1851 great alterations were made on the written text and many new passages added. Indeed, it was not till 1853 that the text as we have it (with a few trifling changes made in still later editions) was reached.

Tennyson's *Princess* has remained a puzzle to most of his critics and biographers. They have been unable to admire the blending of different elements which characterise the poem. While admitting the beauty of the interludes and the splendour of some of the separate passages, almost with one accord the medley has been condemned by the critical world. Yet, when we peruse *The Princess*, although there seems to be some incongruity in it, we are unable to say what is actually at fault, or whether there is any fault at all. The whole is so well constructed, the interludes generally so appropriate, that we are compelled to withhold our condemnation of what is so often censured by the critical guild.

Rightly to appreciate the poem we must first take cognizance of the time in which it was written. We must recall to mind the position which Tennyson occupied when it was published in 1847. It may be regarded as the last voice of the early part of the

nineteenth century. The first half of the nineteenth century was principally taken up with the Romantic Movement. During that period a sentimental love for the Middle Ages and the days of chivalry broke out among the poets and novelists. The admiration of the Past and the adoration of Knighthood, lady-love and nobility, formed the chief themes of the popular writers of that generation, whose influence continued to be paramount in the literature of England until the scientific and realistic cult gradually extinguished it.

Tennyson's *Princess* is one of the last great works of art of the Romantic Movement, for Tennyson belongs to it as well as to the later generation of English poetry whose thought is naturalistic or semi-scientific. Its connection with the Romantic Movement is easily seen in the lingering echoes of Romanticism found in its pages. The prologue, for instance, describes a scene of semi-feudalism, in which ivy-clasped Gothic architecture, abbey ruins, and a family of noble descent, combined with the most recent results of the scientific age, make up the introductory picture. One of the finest of the interludes, too, is romantic in its colouring, and recalls the noblest music of the Romantic Poets.

"The splendour falls on castle walls,  
And snowy summits old in story ;  
The long light shakes across the lakes,  
And the wild cataract leaps in glory."

When the poem was written, however, the age of sentiment and the adoration of the past was break-



ing up before the scientific spirit; and the poem bears upon it the buds of the coming time. It is, therefore, the outcome of what is called a transition period of English thought. This accounts for the poem being a medley, a combination of the romantic and the scientific; it is meant to ring out the old and ring in the new.

The discussion which runs through the poem regarding women's rights is not altogether the leading theme of the work. In order to delineate the heroine of the piece the poet had to introduce the subject of women's rights. It was the best means of setting the character of the "Princess" in strong relief, thus to affix her name to a subject engaging public attention at the time, and describe her as the champion of the New Amazons. But Tennyson had another object in view in composing *The Princess*. While the Women's Rights Question seems to occupy the chief place in the poem, it is really subordinated to another, which is allowed to steal into the work and arrest the imagination by its subtlety and mystery.

We shall best appreciate the meaning of *The Princess* by keeping in mind that Tennyson is to the England of the nineteenth century what Goethe is to Germany during the same period. He is the representative of culture. He is, in other words, what he characterises the hero of his own *Locksley Hall* as being, the Heir of all the Ages, the recipient and apprehender of the best truth of all the great minds which have preceded him, and its re-exponent to his own age in a highly finished and receptive form.

More than once Tennyson has exposed his ambition to comprehend the realm of universal knowledge, to solve "the riddle of this painful earth," and his dissatisfaction with the present state of science and the rate of progress at which knowledge is extending. Echoes of his longings in this direction are audible in *The Palace of Art*, *The Day Dream*, *Locksley Hall*, and *In Memoriam*.

While beating in vain against these limitations, however, Tennyson does not confine himself to murmurings against the incompleteness of the time. Like Goethe, he takes refuge in Art. Unable to pierce the future of science and knowledge, he determines to help in the rebuilding of the Future out of the Present. By holding up a high ideal to his contemporaries he hopes to advance the progress of the world in the only way it can ever be permanently accomplished. So strongly does he believe in the Ideal that the noble characters he depicts are liable to the charge of being overdrawn. His King Arthur, his knights and ladies are perhaps just too grandiose and unreal for mortal personages. But they are ideal figures intended to stimulate imitation and advance the educative aspirations of the age.

With this object in view Tennyson expects to sow the seeds of refinement among the generality. In the poem, in which he describes the festival held by a crowd of citizens in the manor park of an English baronet, Tennyson talks of

"An universal culture for the crowd"

betraying that he had been pondering over the possi-

bilities of the future of England, and its progress and enlightenment.

Judged from this standpoint, we can see what was Tennyson's meaning in composing *The Princess* and bringing together such a strange assortment of feudal sentiments and scientific ideas. The age in which we live is interpenetrated by both the feudal and the scientific ideals. More especially among the upper classes of society—which Tennyson loves to portray—does the feudal prevail. The nobility of England are a highly cultured race of men and women, who have been brought to their present pitch of excellence in manners and traditional sentiments by the accumulated experience of centuries. There, if anywhere, culture should be dominant. Among the nobility of the land the intellectual riches of the British nation should be conserved. Unfortunately, however, it is not always the case that the name of nobleman is synonymous with culture. For occasionally the English nobleman is associated with the jockey club and the gambling saloon; and in an age whose tendency is democratic, a stigma is attached to the gentleman with a title. The man who draws large rents and coal royalties is looked upon as a parasite and a burden upon his fellow-men; and the probabilities are, that before long a new era may decline to buttress up civilisation with a hereditary nobility.

In the event, however, of a social revolution being carried through abolishing an artificial upper class, there is the grand possibility that before its removal a literary movement might take place bringing with it a poet who would catch the feudal manners and

the sentiments of the old nobility, and transform them into poetry, to be available for the multitude who are to be endowed with power. The Romantic Movement seems to have been such a prelude to the Democratic Age, and Tennyson such a poet. Above all other thinkers of his century, he has been the one who has united in himself the spirit of the nobility and the aspirations of the people. When the general public are the recipients of that culture, which Tennyson assumes is the property of nobility, we may be in a position to dispense with what has now come to be considered by one side of the political world an artificial upper class, and institute that age of equality which is the ideal of modern politics. But not till then.

Viewed in the light of these suggestions, *The Princess* becomes intelligible; the blending of the feudal and scientific elements is plain. The Princess Ida is a type, the ideal woman of the future, whose title of nobility is not the artificial one of the Heralds' College. Co-equal with man in the Kingdom of Culture, in the realm of Universal Knowledge humanised and poetised, the woman of the future is not to be a mere drudge of her stronger mate, but a participator in the larger humanity which Tennyson foreshadows in his poetry as the goal of civilisation (*In Memoriam*, 103 and 118; *The Princess*, part iii.). By depicting a female character of the rather stenorian qualities of his Princess Ida, Tennyson hoped to stimulate thought and help on the advent of the "Crowning Race" of which he speaks at the close of *In Memoriam*. The character is exaggerated for the purpose of vividly impressing the reader, for,

under the delicate mock-heroic of the poem there is really the delineation of a fine female nature.

That Tennyson did not mean *The Princess* as a political brochure for the Suffragist Movement, as has been occasionally believed by the advocates of Women's Rights, is evident from the fine eulogium of Womanhood in which the poet paid a tribute of regard to his own mother (vii. 295-298), and in the passage commencing "Blame not thyself too much, I said, nor blame," in which he defines the limits of the sexes and their relationship to each other (vii. 239). This is further emphasised by the part the child plays in the medley. The child, in spite of Ida's vagaries, still holds her heart and becomes at last the means of developing the idea of the Maternal in her, ranking higher than the thirst for knowledge. The interludes between the several sections were at one time intended to be poems emphasising the importance of the child, but Tennyson was unable to satisfy himself with some of his child poems, and so inserted the lyrics "The splendour falls" and "Ask me no more." The following from the *Memoir* will explain this more fully:—"The Child is the link through the parts as shown in the songs, which are the best interpreters of the poem. Before the first edition came out I deliberated with myself whether I should put songs between the separate divisions of the poem; again I thought that the poem would explain itself, but the public did not see the drift. The first song I wrote was named *The Losing of the Child*. The child is sitting on the bank of the river and playing with flowers; a flood comes down; a

dam has been broken through, the child is borne down by the flood; the whole village distracted; after a time the flood has subsided; the child is thrown safe and sound upon the bank, and there is a chorus of jubilant women—

“ The child was sitting on the bank  
 Upon a stormy day,  
 He loved the river's roaring sound;  
 The river rose and burst his bound,  
 Flooded fifty leagues around,  
 Took the child from off the ground,  
 And bore the child away.  
 O the child so meek and wise,  
 Who made us wise and mild.”

—(*Mem.* i. 254-255).

Here Tennyson had to cease; he was unable to complete satisfactorily to himself a piece intended to support the other child interludes; and “The splendour falls,” etc., were used instead. Before the publication of the *Memoir* in 1897, biographers of the poet did not see the force of the child interludes. Mr. Arthur Waugh, whose *Life of Tennyson* was published in 1892, says, “The insertion of the songs, delicate and beautiful in themselves, serves only to accentuate the artificiality of the whole work” (p. 108), and “Mr. Percy Wallace, in his thoughtful study of *The Princess*, argues with some ingenuity that the songs fall readily into the scheme of the whole work; all six centring round the affections, while four have special reference to the beauty of married love. The suggestion, if somewhat artificial, is at least worthy of consideration. But to attempt

to assign artistic unity to what is confessedly a medley is to show a spirit a little too academic and methodical." (*Life of Alfred Lord Tennyson*, p. 111). It is evident that neither Mr. Wallace nor Mr. Waugh had comprehended the drift of the songs.

The meaning of the *The Princess*, taken as a whole, is further brought out by the presence of the Muses in the description of the fantastic scenery of Lady Ida's College and the "weird seizures," introduced into the edition of 1851 (*Mem.* i. 251). The Muses are the marble statues described in the Poem; and posing above all the clamour and extravagance of the maddened crowd of women, they represent the Permanent in the world, the eternal order of things in which man, woman, and child are irrevocably fixed up by divine decree.

"high above them stood  
The placid marble Muses, looking peace." (iv. 467-8).

Women movements may subsist for a time; but the eternal requirements of culture, civilisation, will endure. Here Tennyson resembles Dante in his firm adherence to the eternal verities.

The "weird seizures" also emphasize this teaching, as can be seen from the following passage:—

"On a sudden my strange seizure came  
Upon me, the weird vision of our house;  
The Princess Ida seem'd a hollow show,  
Her gay-furr'd cats a painted fantasy,  
Her college and her maidens, empty masks,  
And I myself the shadow of a dream,  
For all things were and were not."

—(III. 167-173.)

*The Princess* occupies the same place in the works of Tennyson, the poet of English culture, as that strangely beautiful and imaginative *Novelle*, translated by Carlyle in 1832, and published in *Fraser's Magazine*, No. 34, does in the works of Goethe, the poet of German culture. Tennyson was now, through his conversations with Carlyle, well acquainted with the aims of Goethe's culture impulse, and he would no doubt recognise that culture could not be confined to the few, but that, in order to benefit the world, it must ultimately become

“A universal culture for the crowd”—(Prologue),

again emphasised in the Epilogue—

“Wildest dreams  
Are but the needful preludes of the truth ;  
For me, the genial day, the happy crowd,  
The sport half science, fill me with a faith  
This fine old world of ours is but a child  
Yet in the go-cart. Patience ! Give it time  
To learn its limbs ; there is a hand that guides.”

This larger intention of *The Princess* is entirely lost sight of by most of Tennyson's critics. The immediate criticisms made on the poem did not see it at all, and many a writer of Tennyson has dismissed the poem as a fantastic and unreal *jeu d'esprit*. while, in fact, *The Princess* is the most serious and weighty of all Tennyson's productions. The elegant Prologue—written in the playful mood of Ariosto, and meant to discount any strictures which might be made against the too imaginative texture of the



poem—is a perfect masterpiece of the mock heroic, and challenges comparison with *The Rape of the Lock* and the best passages of the great Italian; but few Englishmen understand Ariosto, and without a sympathetic understanding of that gay and bland master Tennyson's *Princess*, which is a masterpiece of many styles harmoniously combined, must remain a sealed book.

On 20th April 1851, Tennyson's first child was born, but died in birth. In July the Tennysons, after this misfortune, left for Italy, visiting Florence, where his eldest brother Frederick now resided, returning by the Splügen to Paris, where they met Mr. and Mrs. Browning and Savile Morton, Tennyson's old college friend. In 1852 Tennyson wrote the patriotic songs "Britons, guard your own" and "Hands all round." The latter is by far the better, and contains two curious paradoxes, often quoted—

"That man's the best cosmopolite  
Who loves his native country best,"

and

"That man's the true Conservative  
Who lops the moulder'd branch away."

The poems were written under fear of invasion from Louis Napoleon, a personage written of four years afterwards in a very different strain. But Napoleon III. was supposed at this time to harbour some crafty design against England.

Hallam Tennyson was born on 11th August 1852, and was the subject of many fine letters to the poet's friends. The poem *Out of the Deep* was commenced

on this occasion. (*Mem.* i. 358.) The second son was named after Arthur Hallam. The *Ode on the Duke of Wellington* was composed in November 1852, and published on the morning of the Duke's funeral. In the beginning of 1853 Tennyson was asked to allow himself to be nominated as Rector of the University of Edinburgh, which he declined. In the summer the Tennysons made a tour to York, Whitby, Redcar, Richmond, and Grasby; and, leaving Mrs. Tennyson at Richmond to return to Grasby, Palgrave and the poet went to Glasgow, thence to Carstairs to visit Robert Monteith, an old college friend. On his return journey the poem entitled *The Daisy* was written in Edinburgh.

In November 1853 the Tennysons removed to Farringford, in the Isle of Wight, their residence for forty years. Here Tennyson settled down to study, reading, botanizing, geologizing, and writing his great life task *The Idylls of the King*, now simmering in his mind, for in August 1854 we find the poet visiting Glastonbury, famous in Arthurian romance. (*Mem.* i. 376.) New friendships were made in the Isle of Wight. Sir John Simeon was a proprietor living at Swainston, "the prince of courtesy," who was often with Tennyson. Mrs. Cameron, a witty and unconventional hostess, enthusiastic about genius and art, drew many lovers of poetry around the poet.

Meanwhile *Maud* was the subject of his present labours—during 1855. In December 1854 he had written *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, the most thrilling of all his battle pieces. Numerous other

short pieces were composed at this time, and translations from Theocritus and other classic poets were made merely as exercises in versification.

*Maud*, one of Tennyson's masterpieces, owed its origin to a short poem beginning "O that 'twere possible," which had been published, says Aubrey De Vere, "in a selected volume got up by Lord Northampton for the aid of a sick clergyman. It had struck him in consequence, I think, of a suggestion made by Sir John Simeon that, to render the poem fully intelligible, a preceding one was necessary. He wrote it; the second poem, too, required a predecessor; and thus the whole work was written, as it were, *backwards*." (*Mem.* i. 379.)

The initial lines, "O that 'twere possible," were written under the following circumstances. Richard Monckton Milnes wrote Tennyson in December 1836 requesting a contribution for a charity book of poetry being got up by Lord Northampton, saying that he had half-promised his lordship a good contribution from the poet. Whereupon Tennyson wrote in great dudgeon, saying he had sworn on oath never to contribute to such vapid books, and hoping that the promise was "one of those elegant fictions with which you amuse your aunts of evenings before you get into the small hours when dreams are true." Milnes, of course, was not only disappointed but angry at this banter, and wrote in reply, to which Tennyson again replied with a long, suave epistle, and sent "O that 'twere possible!" for the *Tribute* of Lord Northampton. Only about half of the original poem is absorbed into *Maud*, section xxvi.

Of that section stanzas 6, 7, 8, and 12 are new. (See Churton Collins, p. 326.)

Tennyson was the poet of the English girl, and the depictions of the girls he has given are as immortal as any of his loftier creations. In his early days he commenced with his fanciful portraits of maidens before he very well knew what was the essential charm of girlhood. His Lilians, Adelines, and Rosalinds are purely artificial delineations, such as a very young poet enamoured of the charm of girlhood could draw in melodious felicities of rhythm. But they are the work of a dilettanti rather than that of a poet.

It was not till he drew *The May Queen* and *The Miller's Daughter* that Tennyson attained to the power of painting a true picture of the veritable English girl. Alice, the miller's daughter, is done to the life. Her lover is a youth of some social standing, and she is the daughter of one in a lower station than her lover; and this situation leaves room for the poet to describe in glowing terms the triumph of beauty, of character, and innate goodness coming to its own. *The May Queen*, too, is another piece in which the heroine is beautifully set off in pathetic circumstances. Tennyson could suit himself to the homely tragedies of every-day life as well as Wordsworth. There is scarcely in literature a finer depiction of the half-child life of the English girl who is being extinguished by a slow fate than the story of Alice, with her little sister Effie and her mother in the background.

*The Gardener's Daughter* is another masterpiece of the same genre, written in rivalry to Coleridge's

*Picture, or the Lover's Resolution*, and perhaps with a glance at some of Wordsworth and Southey's blank verse idylls. But the result is a far finer product than any of the Lake school, for none of the Lake school poets studied the English maiden as Tennyson did, nor brought to perfection the Keatsian gift to paint the beauty of the young English girl, fresh and yet as rich as a newly-opened moss-rose, a combination of the rejuvenescence of spring and the balminess of summer. Perhaps Tennyson's Lincolnshire scenery, with its dewy, fresh fields, browsed by deep-uddered kine, its waterways with leagues of wind-rippled grass, and its rose-grown cottages, and the environment in which he sets his heroines, assisted Tennyson in the depiction of the English girl. The dainty scenery added to the daintiness of his heroines and gave a perfection of colouring to the picture. The gardener's daughter is the masterpiece of this species of heroine, and she will live for ever as one of the finest creations of English poetry.

Katie Willows, the heroine of *The Brook*, published along with *Maud* in 1855, is another rich transcript from nature, heightened by the magic of environment. Tennyson was indebted to Miss Mitford's *Queen of the Meadow*, already mentioned as affording the original hint for *The Miller's Daughter*, for the initial conception of Katie Willows. Miss Mitford's description of Katy Dawson ran:—"Katy Dawson was accounted by common consent the prettiest girl in the parish. Female critics in beauty would be sure to limit the commendation by asserting that her features were irregular, and that she

had not a good feature in her face, and so forth; but these remarks were always made in her absence, and no sooner did she appear than even her critics felt the power of her exceeding loveliness. It was the Hebe look of youth and health, the sweet and joyous expression, and above all the unrivalled brilliancy of colouring that made Katy's face, with all its faults, so pleasant to look upon. A complexion of the purest white, a coral lip, and a cheek like the pear, her namesake, on 'the side that's next the sun,' were relieved by rich curls of brown hair of the very hue of the glossy rind of the horse chestnut, turning when the sun shone on them into threads of gold. Her figure was well suited to her blossomy countenance, round, short, and childlike. Add to this 'a pretty foot, a merry glance, a passing, pleasing tongue,' and no wonder that Katy was the belle of the village." (*Literary Souvenir*, 1827, pp. 178-9.)

In depicting Katie Willows, Tennyson has heightened the realistic but beautiful picture of Miss Mitford into a true idyll. Even the change of name of the heroine is significant. The Dawsons are a hardy race of farmer folks; Katie Willows and her kin are associated with the pleasant brooks. The simile of the chestnut as applied to Katy's hair is enhanced by Tennyson into

" Her eyes a bashful azure, and her hair,  
In gloss and hue the chestnut, when the shell  
Divides threefold to show the fruit within."

The story is told with many a fine touch of that observation of nature and farm-life at describing

which Tennyson is an adept. The Farmer Allan of Tennyson is scarcely the Farmer Allen of Miss Mitford's chapter entitled *The Dell in Our Village*, but Tennyson, I have no doubt, took a liking to the name from the perusal of that charming chapter. Altogether Katie Willows is one of Tennyson's finest examples of young English girlhood.

But it is in *Maud* that Tennyson rises to the height of his art in this department of poetic delineation. Maud is his "Queen-rose of the rosebud garden of girls."

To paint a girl of high life, the product of long centuries of ennobled ancestry and of culture who is yet a child of nature and has the passion of nature burning through the calm exterior of those conventionalities of demeanour demanded by society, is not so easy a task as painting May queens, gardeners' daughters, and charming meadow-girls like Katie Willows. And this is what Tennyson has done in *Maud*. She is the representative of this type. She is the incarnation of the highest product of civilisation, the young girl of accomplishments who is on the verge of stepping into the serious duties of life, with all the attractiveness of the rose just opened. She is not an ideal creation like Imogen, Christabel, or the Blessed Damozelle, to which category Princess Ida rather approaches, but a real creature, over-civilised, perhaps, faultily faultless because belonging to a class where cultivation leads to over-civilisation and the virility of nature has the tendency to be lost in conventionalism. But Maud, though of the icily regular order, retains the

passion if not the virility of nature, and her character in all its subtle complexities is drawn with nicest art by the poet.

Maud is placed against a dark background. Her lover is just the Werther of *Locksley Hall* redepicted as a foil to her beauty and subtle charm. Herein Tennyson showed great artistic judgment; if Maud's lover had been a happy squire or a successful poet half the effect of her character would have been lost. As she is, she shines like a rainbow in a storm-cloud. That her lover is the hero of the Locksley Hall of 1842 is evident from the following considerations:—First, the scenery amid which the two are placed is identical. In the earlier poem we have the old mansion described as—

“ Locksley Hall that in the distance overlooks the sandy tracks,  
And the hollow ocean-ridges roaring into calaracts.  
Many a night from yonder ivied casement ere I went to rest,  
Did I look on great Orion sloping slowly to the West.”

In *Maud* we have this scenery and this reference. to Orion reproduced thus, the hero being depicted

“ Listening now to the tide in its broad-flung, shipwrecking roar,  
Now to the scream of a madden'd beach dragged down by the  
wave,  
Walk'd in a wintry wind by a ghastly glimmer, and found  
The shining daffodil dead, and Orion low in his grave.”

Part I., sec. III.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Compare also stanza seventeen of *The Palace of Art*.



The closing part of *Maud* has also a reference to the same scenery; it speaks of a time of year

“When the face of night is fair on the dewy downs,  
And the shining daffodil dies, and the charioteer  
And starry Gemini hang like glorious crowns  
Over Orion’s grave low down in the West.”

Other parallel passages from both poems indicating their affinity might be quoted, their scenery being composed of an old baronial mansion, a sandy shore, the moor and the main. In the later poem a village is introduced into the picture, and another “Hall” adjacent to the ancestral home of the hero. In the second place, the hero of both poems is the victim of social conventions in the matter of love. The hero of *Locksley Hall* had fallen in love with his cousin Amy, and she had been bestowed upon another in preference to him, whereupon he had turned rebel against society and become misanthropic. In *Maud* the hero goes through a somewhat similar experience, he fearing the loss of his lover because a wealthy suitor came upon the scene and threatened to wreck his hopes. In the earlier poem, it is true, we are made to believe the hero’s rejection had led to the misanthropic bias of his soul, whereas in the later poem the love adventure only serves to intensify a character already prone to misanthropy; but this difference is not material. In the third place, the hero of both poems is a military man about to plunge into action lest he should wither by despair. The hero of *Locksley Hall*, however, makes no special pleadings in favour of war as a salve for misan-

thropy. His range of sympathy is more wide than that of the hero of *Maud*, and he hopes for a time in the history of mankind when war shall have ceased and when there will be a peaceful Federation of the Nations. The hero of *Maud*, on the contrary, is a narrower type of mind, a more engrained misanthrope, more deeply afflicted with the Malady of the Century. These are the chief differences of character, but they are the same type at bottom; they are diseased souls.

The gloomy and misanthropic type of character depicted in *Locksley Hall*, *The Two Voices*, etc., and in *Maud*, is one which had great attractions for Tennyson from the first, for he has it even in the early version of *The Palace of Art*, stanza 17. A good many solutions have been offered of the character; but it seems, contrasting it with his other favourite depictions of men, that the valid interpretation of the persistence of the type in Tennyson's imagination is that it is his conception of his non-Christian view of man as contrasted with Arthur Hallam and King Arthur. Throughout the poem many phrases and expressions indicating that the hero is far removed from the Christian conception of human life, and that in the hero feeling himself the victim of those conventions of society which men have tacitly agreed to respect among themselves, we have the opposite of that character which triumphs through self-suffering and a certain acquiescence in the ways of the world, and does not proclaim its petty griefs from the house-top. The rule of such life is that of "honour"

"The Christless code  
That must have life for a blow."

*Maud* (Part II. i. 1.)

This interpretation of the character saves Tennyson from the charge which was preferred against him by a hasty criticism on the appearance of the poem coeval with the outbreak of the Crimean War, of having composed *Maud* as a vindication of war, and the engagement in war as a cure for national stagnation. The poet of *Locksley Hall*, who desired that a court for the establishment of universal peace might be the final outcome of international exhibitions and a more brotherly intercourse among the nations, could not be validly held to have advocated any such views. Tennyson's ruling idea is the wish to

"fuse the Peoples into one"

(Unpublished Poem, *Mem.* i. 307.)

## CHAPTER VI.

### "THE IDVLLS OF THE KING."

WHILE Tennyson was completing *Maud* he was commencing a larger work which he had long been contemplating. Since the year 1835, when the first draft of the *Morte D'Arthur* was read to his friend Spedding, the subject of the Arthurian legend had haunted his imagination. Two years before he had written *The Lady of Shalott*, his first incursion into old romance, and in the volume of 1842 the two ballad poems of *Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere* and *Sir Galahad* showed that the subject was not sleeping. Tennyson, too, during his wedding tour and on other occasions visited the localities in Cornwall, Glastonbury, and elsewhere connected with the fabulous king.

Tennyson's determination to write an epic about King Arthur dates as far back as 1835, when he wrote the grand fragment *Morte D'Arthur*. It is easily comprehensible how the fragment arose in his mind. His idealization of Arthur Hallam while he was composing the elegies afterwards published as *In Memoriam* naturally made Tennyson revert to the subject of King Arthur as an ideal offering greater scope for the historic imagination to portray a blameless individual than the personality of an

intimate friend. Hence, while he was most deeply smitten with the sorrow of his loss for Arthur Hallam, the project of writing an epic on the fabulous king of the ancient Britons occurred to him. But it was not till 1856 that he again touched the subject in earnest, and he commenced *Merlin and Nimue* (afterwards called *Vivien*) in February of that year while staying with a friend in the New Forest (*Mem.* i. 414). The Idyll was finished on March 31st. *Geraint and Enid* was begun on 16th April and all but finished in August 1856, while the poet and his family were staying in Wales. The scenery of the New Forest and that of Wales are reflected in these two idylls. Tennyson visited Caerleon on Usk during his sojourn here and studied the *Mabinogion*, from which the story of Enid is taken, and other Welsh literature (*Mem.* i. 416). In June 1857 Bayard Taylor, one of the best translators of *Faust*, stayed at Farringford and entertained Tennyson with his talk. Among other things he told Tennyson that "the most beautiful sight in the world was a Norweigan forest in winter, sheathed in ice, the sun rising over it and making the whole landscape one rainbow of flashing diamonds." (*Memoir* i. 418.) On the 9th of July Tennyson wrote the first tentative lines of *Guinevere* (*Mem.* i. 419), which was composed between the first weeks of January and 15th March 1858. In July of the same year was begun *Lancelot and Elaine*, at first called *The Fair Maid of Astolat*. The writing of this idyll was interrupted by a visit to Norway, for which Tennyson started from Hull on 23rd July.

On his voyage he got the imagery of his finest wave simile in *Lancelot and Elaine*. *The Grandmother* and *Sea Dreams* were written about this time, but were not published till afterwards. In the spring of 1859 the first four idylls to be published were issued, *Enid*, *Vivien*, *Elaine*, and *Guinevere* (*Mem.* i. 436). Ten thousand copies were sold the first week, and all the reviews were favourable. The best, in my estimation, is in the *North British Review*, August 1859. The other leading articles were: *Edinburgh Review*, 223, 1859; *Quarterly Review*, 212, 1859; *Blackwood's Magazine*, 608, November 1859.

The remainder of the Idylls were gradually written as Tennyson found himself in the proper mood. (*Mem.* ii. 125.) The following are the dates of publication. In 1862 a new edition with the dedication to the Prince Consort was published. In 1869 came *The Holy Grail* volume containing *The Coming of Arthur*, *The Holy Grail*, *Pelleas and Ettarre*, and *The Passing of Arthur*. With the publication of this volume the eight Idylls formed an epic arranged thus—1, *The Coming of Arthur*; 2, *Enid*; 3, *Vivien*; 4, *Lancelot and Elaine*; 5, *The Holy Grail*; 6, *Pelleas and Ettarre*; 7, *Guinevere*; *The Passing of Arthur*.

In 1871 *The Last Tournament* was published in the *Contemporary Review* (December 1871). *Gareth and Lynette* was issued in 1872. The *Lines to the Queen*, lines 9-28 added to *The Passing of Arthur*, and the marriage song to *The Coming of Arthur*, were written in 1872. In 1874, 150 lines, following line 5, were added to *Merlin and Vivien*; and in

1885 *Balin and Balan* was published. In 1888 *Geraint and Enid* was divided into *The Marriage of Geraint* and *Geraint and Enid*, evidently to make up the idylls to the number of twelve. This completed *The Idylls of the King*, which occupied the poet for about fifty years in composing. With the exception of Goethe's *Faust*, no other poetical work of modern times engaged the energies of its author over so long a period.

*The Holy Grail* was being written in 1868 (*Mem.* ii. 57, 83). It was principally at the instigation of His Grace the eighth Duke of Argyll that Tennyson undertook the composition of *The Holy Grail*. (*Mem.* i. 456.) It had been suggested to the Duke by Lord Macaulay as the subject for an idyll. Strange to say, Tennyson was reluctant to touch the theme at first. (*Mem.* i. 459.) *Gareth and Lynette* was commenced on 7th October, 1869. (*Mem.* ii. 82.) The Idylls were finally arranged as follows:—

1. The Coming of Arthur.
2. Gareth and Lynette.
3. The Marriage of Geraint.
4. Geraint and Enid.
5. Balin and Balan.
6. Merlin and Vivien.
7. Lancelot and Elaine.
8. The Holy Grail.
9. Pelleas and Ettarre.
10. The Last Tournament.
11. Guinevere.
12. The Passing of Arthur.

Every modern antique labours under a certain disadvantage because founded upon works of art belonging to antiquity, and consequently it challenges comparison with its sources and is approved or disapproved according as the reader thinks ill or well of the originals. This we find in perusing the criticisms of Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*. But, on the other hand, a modern antique has an advantage over a purely original work because it is founded on the works of others who have made known the legend on which the new writer is operating, and his poem has not to subsist in its own atmosphere, so to speak. Hence the tremendous popularity of some works such as Corneille's *Cid*, Molière's *Don Juan*, Goethe's *Faust*, and in music Wagner's *Ring* founded on the *Nibelungenlied*, subjects which have interested the popular imagination for centuries.

The Arthurian legend is dim in its origin. The first narrator of the exploits of Arthur is Nennius, who lived about the year 800. (*King Arthur in History and Legend*, p. 14, by Professor W. Lewis Jones, 1911.) The account embodied in the chronicle of Nennius may be older than the year 800. Some authorities ascribe it to the sixth century. The author of the Introduction to *Geoffrey of Monmouth in Everyman's Library* (p. ix) dates the history of Nennius 826. Much discussion has taken place as to the date of Arthur's career, some saying the sixth, others the fifth century. Nennius enumerates the twelve battles in which Arthur is said to have fought against the Saxons, but the sites of none of these have been identified. The most plausible view of



the locality of the original Arthurian victories is that they extended from some distance north and south of Carlisle. The two popular views prevalent in the latest Arthurian romances were that Arthur's court was located at Camelot and Caerleon on Usk, the latter the Welsh form of the legend. There is no room for a development later than these two forms of the legend in which Carlisle would have been the centre of Arthur's activity; and consequently, the legend having Carlisle for its centre, must be regarded as the earliest form of the tradition. This would make the original Arthurian country lie between the Clyde and the Forth on the north and the Humber on the south. We can very well believe that this tract, the first to be vacated by the Romans on the retrocession of their power, would have been the scene of some early exploits in which a British leader came forth to assert his supremacy against both the Saxons and the Romans, and for a time succeeded in establishing some kind of order of which the Round Table is the imaginative expression.

But the Arthurian legend commences in reality with the *History of Geoffrey of Monmouth*, written about 1150. The nature of this work, a kind of epic of wonders rather than a history of the kings of Britain, which it purports to be, may be gathered from its descriptions of Loch Lomond, which is described as a loch with sixty islands, receiving sixty rivers; on the islands are sixty rocks with an eyre of eagles each, "and there congregating year by year to notify any prodigy that is to come to pass in the kingdom by uttering a shrill scream altogether in

concert" (*Temple Classics*, p. 235). King Arthur is depicted by Geoffrey as crowned king at fifteen years of age (p. 226). He defeats the Saxons and Paynims in several encounters. His sword is called "Caliburn" (p. 233). Arthur's sister has been married to Lot, who is Duke of Lothian, and there are two sons of this marriage, Gawain and Modred. Arthur marries Guinevere, who had been brought up in the household of a Duke Cadur, and she surpassed in beauty all the other dames of the island (p. 239).

Arthur now undertakes a war against Norway, intending to make his nephew Lot king of that country. Having conquered Norway and Denmark, he next turns to Gaul, which he also conquers, and returns to Caerleon, situated on the river Usk in Glamorgan (p. 245). The glories of Caerleon are described in glowing terms, and Arthur is coronated amid great festivities. Shortly after we find a demand made by "Lucius, Procurer of the (Roman) Republic," for tribute and submission. This calls forth a counterclaim by Arthur against the Romans, and a war ensues in which the British king is completely victorious over Lucius. Meantime, Arthur, having deputed the government of Britain to Queen Guinevere and his nephew Modred during his absence on the continent, his nephew turns out to be the traitor in his own family, and had "tyrannously and traitorously set the crown of the kingdom upon his own head, and had linked him in unhallowed union with Guinevere the queen in despite of her former marriage" (p. 287). A civil war now takes

place between the partizans of Arthur and those of Modred, in which the latter was gradually forced into Cornwall, where a final great battle is fought and Modred is killed, and Arthur, mortally wounded, dies. Queen Guinevere returns to Caerleon and purposes "thenceforth to lead a chaste life among the nuns, and did take the veil of their order in the church of Julius the Martyr" (p. 290).

The resemblance of the career and character of Arthur thus portrayed by Geoffrey of Monmouth to the life and character of Christ, Modred acting as the Judas of the story, became the foundation of all the future developments of the legend. The further Christianization of the tradition required other developments which can be easily accounted for, as the story was utilized for moral purposes. Whether King Arthur was a real historical personage or not is comparatively of little importance. He may have been one of the British kings re-named by Nennius or the fabrication of the writer. The conquests of Norway and Gaul ascribed to Arthur are doubtless magnified accounts of some help given by a British king to neighbouring tribes in Scotland and Brittany. The conquest of Rome is pure fabrication in the epic style, with speeches of King Arthur and his compatriots after the manner of Agamemnon and his confederate chiefs. Geoffrey allowed his imagination to run riot in his admiration of the classics, with which he was well acquainted. The Round Table, Launcelot and Tristram, do not yet make their appearance.

Wace was the next to develop the Arthurian

legend; it was he who introduced the Round Table. He wrote about 1155, and he incorporated details from French sources. He added to the account of the passing of Arthur the expectation of the second advent of his hero. Layamon, writing a little later than Wace, added to the supernatural element of the legend, and heightened the importance of the Round Table and of Arthur's return.

Christianity during the time of the growth of the Arthurian legend was in an interesting stage of its career. The character of Christ had become lost behind the worship of the saints, but was appreciated, mostly in the southern countries of Europe, from its feminine side through the adoration of the Virgin, and from its masculine side, in the northern latitudes, through the character of King Arthur. Arthur was the strong man, not the monkish man given to celibacy, but acknowledging the other sex as the other half of the human soul. It was requisite, therefore, that Arthur should be a worshipper of woman as well as a devoted knight of the Lord. He was the ideal married man, representative of Christian perfection, the flower of chivalry, the semi-Christ, in fact. Hence the belief which became attached to the legend that there was to be a second coming of Arthur, which was, of course, just a reflection of the doctrine of the Second Advent applied to the hero of the Arthurian romance as it was afterwards applied to Barbarosso. Dean Alford, in an article in the *Contemporary Review* for May 1873, says:—"The royal liberator of his people—who shall surely come again and complete his work;—the

mystically born king, victorious, defeated, but deathless—this was the central figure of a whole literature which flourished for generations, and doubtless was the secret of its wonderful influence and duration. It is difficult not to see the analogy it suggests and difficult to doubt that as a knightly vision of the Christ Himself that figure became so popular in the days of chivalry. It may surely well have been so, for all the thought of the time ran unconsciously into but one mould, and—as a sort of compromise between the Christ of the Gospels and the Christ which men were able to bear—the ideal of chivalry was fostered by clerical learning and invention as much as by lay imitation and reverence.”

The *Morte D'Arthur* of Sir Thomas Malory, published in 1485, consists of various narratives fused together without much regard to consistency, but attaining to a certain continuity of narrative, culminating in the break-up of the Round Table and the death of the King. There are at least six different sources which have been employed by Malory in making his compilation, and they all differ from each other in some way and introduce conflict of view into the narrative. These sources consist of—

A. A history of King Arthur and his knights of the Round Table, in which the king is represented as holding his Court at Carlisle. This history contains—

I. The Book of Merlin.

III. The Book of the Round Table and the Three Quests.

- IV. The Book of Morgan le Fay and the Three Damsels.
- V. The Book of the Emperor Lucius.
- VI. The Book of Sir Launcelot du Lake.
- VIII. The First Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones.
- IX. The Book of Sir La-Cote-male-taile.
- XVIII. The Book of Elaine.
- XX. The Book of Sir Launcelot and the King.
- XXI. The Book of the Morte D'Arthur.

This history commences with narrating the deeds of Merlin, and tells of Uther Pendragon and his son Arthur. It repeats in the Book of the Emperor Lucius the Roman victories of Arthur as enumerated by Geoffrey of Monmouth. In order to bring about the downfall of the Round Table and the death of Arthur by treachery, Modred, who in *Geoffrey of Monmouth* figures as the nephew of the King, is said to be King Arthur's son by incestuous connection with his sister. This moral delinquency, required by the moral instincts of the time as the crux of the story of Arthur to account for his overthrow, lowers the character of the monarch of Geoffrey's original. Launcelot, too, depicted as the ideal knight, is smirched with guilty love for Queen Guinevere, in order to intensify the catastrophe. Against these black shadows stands the beautiful creation of Elaine, who in this history is the peerless maid dying of a broken heart, the result of an incurable but pure passion.

In the compilation of Malory Launcelot has become as important a personage as King Arthur, and the war against the Romans which the King was prosecuting while Modred was furthering his treasonable designs in England, as recorded by Geoffrey of Monmouth, is changed into a war against Sir Launcelot. In the Romance, after Modred is killed and Arthur dies, Sir Launcelot returns to England and enters into a holy life, and his death is told with much pathetic detail, and a long moral is drawn from the history of Arthur, Guinevere, and Launcelot in the style of the pious writers of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The date of the original Romance may have been 1200 A.D., half a century after Geoffrey of Monmouth.

B. Another narrative of King Arthur and his Round Table entitled *The Book of Marvellous Adventures* (No. x. of Malory). The Court of King Arthur is at Camelot. This is the most tedious of all Malory's sources. Its interest is centred largely in the adventures of Sir Tristram and his relationship to King Mark of Cornwall, and Sir Palomides and the Glatissant, or Questing Beast, the result of the quest of which has been omitted by Malory.

C. The book relating the adventures of the knights who went in quest of the Holy Grail, consisting of—

XI. The Book of Sir Launcelot du Lake.

XIII. The Book of Sir Percivale.

- XIV. The Book of Sir Launcelot's Vision.
- XV. The Book of Sir Bors.
- XVI. The Book of the Achievement of the Holy Grail.

Elaine figures in this work as the mother of Galahad, not the pure maiden of Romance A. The development of medieval idealism demanded a new and different ideal of knighthood from that depicted in Sir Launcelot, and consequently the new romancers gave Sir Launcelot a son who surpassed his father in spiritual vision. The necessity of making Elaine the mother of this ideal knight was forced upon the romancers by the fact that Launcelot had still to be depicted as the unwedded lover of Queen Guinevere, without which the catastrophe could not have been worked out in accordance with the tradition. By this means Malory's compilation has two Elaines.

D. Another Epos of King Arthur and the Round Table, left in a fragmentary condition, consisting of—

- II. The Book of Balin the Savage.
- VII. The Book of Sir Gareth.
- XII. The Book of Sir Galahad.
- XVII. The Book of Sir Modor.

The scene of the Court of this narrative was originally Camelot, and the children of Lot, King of Orkney, are, next to Arthur, the most prominent figures. Sir Gareth is painted as a knight doing the lowest form of service to attain to the ideal character of knighthood. This had already been done in Romance A in



the *Book of La-Cote-male-taille*; but in *Sir Gareth* it is worked out with greater precision and beauty. In the *Book of Sir Galahad* the motive of the downfall of Arthur and the Round Table was to be the quest of the Holy Grail. This may have been suggested by an assertion in xvi. 16 (Romance C) that "many of the knights of the Round Table were slain and destroyed by half"; but the motive is quite different from that of Romance A, and Romance C could not have proceeded upon its assumption. The *Book of Sir Modor* (XVII.) is also a portion of this document.

E. The *Book of the Queen's Maying* (XIX.) is a separate romance, having for its motive the threatened destruction of Queen Guinevere, in which Sir Meligraunce takes the place of Sir Modor. This episode resembles Christien de Troye's *Knight of the Cart*. The *Book of Sir Launcelot and the King* (XX.), which belongs to Romance A, holds the same place as the *Book of the Queen's Maying* did in another narrative of King Arthur and the Round Table and the *Book of Sir Modor* in Romance D. The first sentence of the *Book of Sir Launcelot and the King* is expanded by Malory into the first paragraph of the *Book of the Queen's Maying*, in order to connect the latter with the general narrative.

F. The *French Book*, often referred to by Malory. This volume was probably a compilation resembling Malory's, or a collection of Arthurian romances. Renan blames the French writer for the wanton passages in Malory, and there is

some reason for believing that foreign influences introduced the shady amours into the *Book of Sir Gareth*, for instance, for they are diametrically opposed to the lofty ideality of its original author. The *French Book*, however, cannot be blamed for all the frailties ascribed to Arthur and his knights. Romance A must have contained the preliminaries to the birth of Modred as given in Malory, i. 17.

Malory, in cementing his documents, wrote bits here and there at the beginning and end of the parts of the documents he was re-narrating, and these were held to have fused the often contradictory narratives into one.

The Welsh group of legends regarding King Arthur need not detain us long. When they were written is uncertain, but the first two in the *Mabinogion*, called *Kilhwch* and *Olwen* and *Rhonabwy's Dream*, are supposed to be earlier than the remainder of the series, the *Lady of the Fountain*, *Peredur*, and *Geraint*. The first two represent Arthur as an indigenous British knight, and the scene of action is laid in Britain. In the other stories Arthur and his followers have become Norman knights. This would imply that the first two were written before Geoffrey's history, and the remainder about the same period, but this dating is of course not authenticated by a contemporary publication.

Spenser, the only poet of any consequence before Tennyson to make use of the Arthurian Romance, depicts Arthur as the Prince of Magnificence (or

Magnanimity), a virtue which includes all the others described under allegorical guises in his wonderful *Faery Queen*. By making Arthur come to the rescue of the representatives of holiness, temperance, chastity, and the other virtues, when they are in straits, Spenser exalted Arthur to the highest pinnacle of his platonic idealism.

The *Coming of Arthur*, the opening idyll of Tennyson's epic, is finely conceived. Leodogran, the King of Cameliard, the father of Guinevere, the fairest of all flesh on earth, sits debating within himself whether to give his daughter to Arthur, who has assisted him to recover his lands from the heathen hosts. The Roman rule had just passed away in Britain, and an age of lawlessness had succeeded, but Arthur had at last united the country under himself. He is in the beginning of his career, and has asked for Guinevere. But Leodogran hesitates to give his daughter because various rumours of Arthur's parentage are abroad, some denying that he is rightful king, some asserting his legitimacy. Leodogran consults various knights on the subject, and Bedivere gives the general rumour. At this moment an opportune event happened. Bellicent, the wife of Lot, King of Orkney, and sister to King Arthur, arrives at Cameliard. She narrates to the King of Cameliard her infant experiences of Arthur as a brother. This gives the poet the opportunity to introduce all the coming possibilities of the epic, for Bellicent describes King Arthur, Mage Merlin, and the mystic Lady of the Lake, and Excalibur. From this Bellicent goes on to give what Bleys, the

master of Merlin, had told her regarding the coming of Arthur, and this is the account which our imagination fixes on as the most striking and wonderful; and we are left to assume that Arthur is a mystic king, because

“From the great deep to the great deep he goes,”

the last line of a beautiful lyric of Merlin, who had been quizzed upon the subject of the birth of Arthur.

King Leodogran at last answers in the affirmative to Arthur's request for his daughter's hand, and Arthur charges Lancelot, his best knight, to ride forth and bring the Queen. Lancelot passes away among the flowers of April, and returns among the flowers of May, a journey that Tennyson often dwelt upon in his poetry, and Arthur and Guinevere are united by Dubric, the saint, chief of the Church in Britain. Another fine lyric comes in at the close of the first idyll. Rome,

“The slowly fading mistress of the world,”

sends some of her great lords to demand tribute; but this is denied by Arthur, for a Christian civilization has taken the place of the Roman Empire. Arthur, in accordance with the earliest legend (Nennius), fights twelve great battles against the heathen hordes, and makes a realm and reigns.

The opening idyll is dramatically conceived, and lays bare the situation with great beauty of language.

The second idyll, *Gareth and Lynette*, was among the last to be written by Tennyson, who, in constituting the idylls into a whole, saw that some

depiction of the dawn of Arthur's reign was necessary to complete the picture of the shadowy king of romance. In composing *Gareth and Lynette* Tennyson was challenging comparison with one of the most beautiful of the books of Malory. The idyll is redolent of the spirit of youth; a feeling as of a new age pervades the whole poem. Gareth is a young man, the youngest son of that Bellicent of Orkney who had already appeared in the first idyll. He is kept at home by his mother, and he feels, now that he has become a man, he must be up and doing something in the world. He wishes to

“ fly disengaged to sweep  
In ever-highering eagle-circles up  
To the great sun of Glory, and thence swoop  
Down upon all things base, and dash them dead,  
A knight of Arthur, working out his will  
To cleanse the world.”

Gareth is full of the rumours of King Arthur's Court; and his mother, in order to repress his enthusiasm to leave the family nest, puts the task upon him to go and serve for a year and a day in Arthur's kitchen. This indignity, however, only serves to bring out in relief the genuine character of his knighthood. The maiden Lynette, who at first scorns his succour and taunts him as unworthy to be her champion, is more pertinently drawn than in the original of Malory.

“ A damsel of high lineage, and a brow  
May-blossom, and a cheek of apple-blossom,  
Hawk-eyes; and lightly was her slender nose  
Tip-tilted like the petal of a flower.”

This last touch is one of the telling characterizations that often distinguish Tennyson from Malory. In Malory Gareth marries Lyonors, but Tennyson makes him marry Lynette, which is more natural.

The third and fourth idylls, the *Marriage of Geraint* and *Geraint and Enid*, re-narrate from the *Mabinogion* the beautiful but somewhat fantastic story of the jealousy of Geraint, one of the knights of Arthur's court. Enid is one of Tennyson's fairest creations. The poet has embellished the Welsh story, one of the best in the *Mabinogion*, with many a fine touch of imaginative colouring. One of these may be noted. After Geraint is reconciled to Enid, and mounts her on his horse behind him, the poet makes the beautiful addition to the Welsh account—

“ And never yet, since high in Paradise  
O'er the four rivers the first roses blew,  
Came purer pleasure unto mortal kind  
Than lived thro' her, who in that perilous hour  
Put hand to hand beneath her husband's heart,  
And felt him hers again : she did not weep,  
But o'er her meek eyes came a happy mist  
Like that which kept the heart of Eden green  
Before the useful trouble of the rain.”

This is one of Tennyson's inimitable passages by which he re-created the old legends and stories of Arthur into new life.

The story of Geraint advances the argument of the Epic by bringing in the first note of discord. This is the unhappy love between the Queen and Lancelot, which is only incidentally mentioned, however. The subject of love between a king's

intended bride and the emissary sent to fetch her home was a favourite with the romancers of the age of High Romance. Tristram and Iseult was the supreme example on which poets and prose romancers lavished their art. The subject of Lancelot and Guinevere had already been treated by Tennyson in his early days, and in the epic he had to re-paint it. It may be a question if Tennyson's Arthurian Epic had not been more rounded and complete if this note of discord had been delayed by the interposition between *Gareth and Lynette* and the *Geraint* Idylls of others displaying more fully the happiness of the reign of Arthur and the success of the Round Table. The tragic note seems to come in too early; and Tennyson may have at one time intended to interpose another idyll here, but perhaps abandoned the intention in 1888, when he sub-divided the *Geraint* story to make out twelve idylls in his epic.

In the next idyll the character of Vivien introduces the seeds of discord. Vivien is the courtesan whose evil heart begets the evil eye sharpened to suspect where there is the least appearance of immoral intrigue, and she knows how to send the winged seeds of scandal on the winds of rumour. She figures in the next two idylls, *Balin and Balan* and *Merlin and Vivien*. The former was written to introduce Vivien. The poet has associated her with the dark cavern-chasm of the wood, typifying Hell, by subtle touches of imagination; and in the latter he makes her the evil genius who ruins Merlin. Merlin is the magician who is capable of all things and ruled the imagination of Europe before Faust took

his place, and like Faust (the Faust of Marlowe and the *Faustbuch*), in accordance with medieval views, he came to a bad end. Tennyson makes Vivien, who is painted as the intellectual as well as the fleshly female sensualist, the cause of Merlin's overthrow. But Vivien's influence spreads far and wide; she is the counterpoise of Arthur—

“as Arthur in the highest  
Leaven'd the world, so Vivien in the lowest  
Arriving at a time of golden rest  
And sowing one ill hint from ear to ear,  
While all the heathen lay at Arthur's feet  
And no quest came, but all was joust and play  
Leaven'd his hall.”

Vivien, arrived at the court of Arthur from the court of King Mark of Cornwall, sees Lancelot and the Queen ride away to the hunt, and she says—

“ Ah, little rat that borest in the dyke  
Thy hole by night to let the boundless deep  
Down upon far-off cities while they dance—  
Or dream—of thee they dream'd not—nor of me  
These—ay, but each of either; ride, and dream  
The mortal dream that never yet was mine—  
Ride, ride and dream until ye wake—to me!  
Then, narrow court and lubber king, farewell!  
For Lancelot will be gracious to the rat,  
And our wise Queen, if knowing that I know,  
Will hate, loathe, fear—but honour me the more!”

This is the turning point of Tennyson's epic, of the whole movement of the story; for, from this expression of the suspicion of Vivien the Round Table begins to dissolve, and the later idylls are a descrip-



tion of the dissolution of the Round Table leading up to the catastrophe of the weird battle in the West.

In *Lancelot and Elaine* Tennyson has the opportunity of describing in all its strength the love of Lancelot and Guinevere, emphasised by the jealousy of the Queen against the innocent cause of her resentment. By general consent this idyll is reckoned one of the most triumphant efforts of Tennyson. The characters of Arthur, Lancelot, Guinevere, and the beautiful Elaine stand out like embossed portraits. Queen Guinevere is the most beautiful woman of the world, to the medieval age what Helen was to the Greeks; while Elaine represents the more spiritual womanhood, what Antigone was in later Greek culture. The pathetic story of Elaine is told by Tennyson in language in which he rises to the height of his art. Elaine would have been the true wife for Lancelot, not Guinevere; if he had met Elaine before Guinevere he might have been the perfect Knight. Having met Guinevere before Elaine, while he is the most redoubtable specimen of Arthurian chivalry, he is the victim of a love which can have only a fatal end and drag down a kingdom with it in giving way to its seductions. Lancelot had a glimpse of this truth after the death of Elaine. He cries—

“ Ah, simple heart and sweet,  
Ye loved me, damsel, surely with a love  
Far tenderer than my Queen’s.”

In the *Holy Grail* Tennyson develops his epic argument. In the former idyll Lancelot, in answer to the knight, young Lavaine, brother of Elaine, had said—

"Me you call great ; mine is the firmer seat,  
The truer lance ; but there is many a youth  
Now crescent who will come to all I am  
And overcome it ; and in me there dwells  
No greatness, save it be some far-off touch  
Of greatness to know well I am not great."

Lancelot's greatness was thus to be superseded by a more spiritual kind than that of muscular prowess, and the Quest of the Holy Grail was its object. In the *Holy Grail* Tennyson shows how Lancelot fails in the highest, and how the quest led to the loss of many fair knights who followed in this adventure wandering fires. Tennyson in accordance with the *Book of Sir Galahad* in Malory thus paints the quest of the Grail as a disintegrating force.

*Pilleas and Ettarre* is the next idyll, in which a young knight resembling Sir Gareth goes forth upon an adventure and meets with Ettarre. She is a female voluptuary like Vivien, but she has not the mental qualities of Vivien, who, overcoming Merlin, the wisest man of his time, is painted as of a higher order than Ettarre. Ettarre is not an intellectual sensualist ; she is merely representative of the woman with "lightness of character, loose desire, scorn of truth and honesty in the things of love, and naturally in other matters" (Rev. Stopford Brooke, *Tennyson and his Art*, etc., p. 287). She is a voluptuary, and in Gawain she meets her mate. The presence of these types contributes to the dissolution of the Order of the Round Table. From both proceed

"Red ruin and the breaking up of laws."

The destruction of Pelleas by this base woman is also typical. Elaine, the ideal maid of the epic—Tennyson's Antigone, Cymbeline or Christabel—was brought to death by the impossibility of Lancelot's loving her because he nursed a passion for one who could never be his wife. And Pelleas is brought to destruction by the presence in the land of Arthur of a woman who utterly disregarded the Ideals of the Round Table and was a scoffer at all the pretensions of knighthood. The moral of Tennyson is clear. When the civilisation of a country has become such as to crush out of existence the Elaines—the Antigones, the Cymbelines, the Christabels—and the young male enthusiasts like Pelleas, the end is near at hand. It is then that the Modreds perceive that their time has come. Hence the concluding line of the idyll—

“And Mordred thought, ‘The time is hard at hand.’”

The *Last Tournament* describes the autumnal stage of the Round Table, and nature is made to sympathise with the decay that is apparent everywhere. The account of the tournament closes with the story of Tristram and Iseult, and how King Mark slew Tristram. Other signs of moral decadence are introduced. A knight, once of the Round Table, has revolted and set up an opposition Round Table in the North, to advance the vices which are the contrary of the virtues of Arthur's Order. Tristram is painted in very disparaging colours; his character departs very widely from the accepted Tristram of the finer legends about him. The kernel of the Tristram story

is the conflict between the dark and the fair woman, between the Iseult of Ireland and the Iseult of Brittany. Tennyson makes Tristram an adulterer.

*Guinevere* is by general consent of Tennyson's admirers the very finest of the idylls, and the one in which his art as a blank-versifier comes to its height. The scene between Guinevere and Arthur is the most pathetic in all Tennyson's work. The two long addresses of the king to Guinevere are unsurpassed for their beauty of sentiment and expression. Notwithstanding this, carpers have not been wanting who disparage the address of Arthur to Guinevere as savouring too much of the masculine superiority over woman which, they assert, characterises all Tennyson's utterances where the question of the relative merits of the sexes is concerned. Unfavourable comparisons with William Morris's *Defence of Guinevere* have also been instituted. Thus Mr. Lang in his *Life of Tennyson*, p. 155, says—"Critics have usually condemned the last parting of Guinevere and Arthur, because the king doth preach too much to an unhappy woman who has no reply. The position of Arthur is not easily redeemable; it is difficult to conceive that a noble nature could be, or should be, blind so long. He does rehabilitate the Queen in her own self-respect, perhaps by assuring her that he loves her still :—

“ ‘ Let no man dream but that I love thee still.’

Had he said that one line and no more, we might have loved him better. In the idylls we have not

Malory's last meeting of Lancelot and Guinevere, one of the scenes in which the wandering composite romance ends as nobly as the *Iliad*." (*Modern English Writers*.)

The Rev. Stopford Brooke says: "Tennyson makes Arthur, at a time when personal feeling should be supreme, turn aside to give a lecture on the subject of national purity, and of Guinevere's destruction of his work as a king. The king should have been dropped altogether and the man alone have spoken. I wish, if it be not impertinent to do so, that the whole of the passage beginning so like a sermon,

" 'Bear with me for the last time while I show,'

and ending with

" 'The mockery of my people and their bane,'

were, with the exception of a few lines, left out, and I wish also that the other passage beginning

" 'O golden hair with which I used to play,  
Not knowing,'

and ending

" 'So far, that my doom is, I love thee still,'

were also expunged. It is too literal; it may be thought, but not expressed. I do not believe that the imagination would have permitted it, if it had not been half-blinded by the sermon that precedes it. Both passages are outside the situation; the first is too much in the cold, the second too much in the flesh." (*Tennyson, his Art*, pp. 351-2.)

This is certainly a drastic proposal; to do as the critic suggests would be to denude the *Idyll* of its epic quality. It is founded partly on the assumption that the *Idylls* are a series of independent or loosely affiliated poems, not an epic whole; and it implies a totally inadequate apprehension of what Tennyson was driving at in depicting his King Arthur.

In studying the *Idylls of the King* we must keep in mind the old legends of King Arthur as told by Geoffrey of Monmouth, Wace, Layamon, the delineation of Arthur's character as given in Spenser's *Faery Queen*, the character of the Prince Consort, whom Tennyson recognised as an ideal prince, the character of Arthur Hallam, whom Tennyson revered as the highest type of young manhood of the greatest possibilities untimely nipped by death, and the character of "The Christ that is to be" of *In Memoriam*. All these fleeting generalities pass through and blend in Tennyson's poetic imagination in his re-depiction of King Arthur. Like the phases of the moon, the character of the king of old legend runs into and is lost in that of Christ, the "Christ that is to be"; but the delineation of Spenser, the character of Hallam, and that of Prince Albert flit across Tennyson's rediscovery or reconstruction of the Arthur of High Romance. These three formed the human bridge, so to speak, enabling Tennyson to reconstruct the legend for his century and make out of it the ideal man of modern culture. Tennyson's King Arthur is the heart and hope of the nineteenth century.

Tennyson's King Arthur is not the Arthur of

Malory, as has been so often assumed by his critics and biographers; he is, on the contrary, rather the King Arthur of the Chroniclers, Geoffrey of Monmouth, Wace, and Layamon, who had a more virtuous view of Arthur's character than the romancers on whom Malory founds. This is quite apparent when we consider that in Malory Modred figures as Arthur's illegitimate son, while in the Chroniclers he is his nephew. This momentous distinction divides the Arthur of Tennyson from the Arthur of Malory, from whom, however, the poet took many incidents, details, and expressions to constitute the delineation of his blameless king, who is, in fact, a reproduction of Spenser's chivalrous monarch rather than the king of old romance. Tennyson selected his material largely from Document D of Malory's sources. His *Gareth and Lynette*, his *Balin and Balan*, and the motive of the Holy Grail as one of the disintegrating causes of the break up of the Round Table, are from this source. Tennyson's moral affinities made him gravitate to these sections of Malory, which are not so affected with the lax morality of other portions of the work of the old babbler who could not distinguish between the original high ideality of his own theme and the degradations of its later decadence. Tennyson's delineation of Arthur is the semi-Christ of the Chroniclers, not the Arthur of the romancers who dragged down his character to the lower level of Lancelot and Tristram.

When we take all these into consideration we are in a position to judge of such estimates of Tenny-

son's Arthur which would denude him of his semi-Christ nature and place him on a level with Lancelot as a mere human actor in the drama of the Arthurian Legends. To have re-created Malory's king, like Lancelot and Tristram, the victim of passion, would not have served the purpose of Tennyson, which was to delineate to his own generation, vaguely and dimly, "The Christ that is to be," to restore the original idea of Arthur as it came dimly into existence in the far-off ages—to be an ideal for us. And hence the oft-repeated mystical line of the Idylls—

"From the great deep to the great deep he goes."

And hence, too, the address to the Queen at the close of the second last Idyll. Arthur speaks there in the capacity of Arthur the semi-Christ as well as Arthur the man. The two phases of his character are there made to blend imperceptibly, and we do not know very well where in the address to Guinevere he speaks now as one, now as another, but he speaks thus; for in his farewell he is the Epic King of Immortal Song, the never-dying, though he is hastening to his doom. Tennyson's creation, thus regarded, condemns all such criticisms as those preferred by Mr. Lang and Mr. Brooke against this Idyll. His attitude toward the sinning Guinevere is part of his rôle as the Christ of Romance.



## CHAPTER VII.

### THE HEIR OF ALL THE AGES.

BROWNING, in his description of Cleon, a Greek artist, makes his character say—

“I have not chanted verse like Homer, no—  
Nor swept string like Tirpander, no—nor carved  
And painted men like Phidias and his friend:  
I am not great as they are, point by point.  
But I have entered into sympathy  
With these four, running these into one soul  
Who, separate, ignored each other's art.  
Say, is it nothing that I know them all?”

Cleon is the type of the man of universal knowledge and culture who is acquainted with many departments of art and knowledge, though perhaps perfect master of none. He lives in an age of Renaissance in which the forms of art are borrowed from the great masters rather than new creations born of the hour. Cleon, in fact, is an “heir of all the ages.”

This title first applied by Tennyson in his *Locksley Hall* was probably suggested by reading an article in *Blackwood's Magazine* for August 1832, in which Christopher North compares Sir Walter Scott and Chateaubriand as the two leaders of Romanticism in Britain and France respectively. He says of the

latter—"The great characteristic of the French author is the impassioned and enthusiastic turn of his mind. Master of immense information, thoroughly imbued at once with the learning of classical and of catholic times; gifted with a retentive memory, a poetical fancy, and a painter's eye, he brings to bear upon every subject the force of erudition, the images of poetry, the charm of varied scenery, and the eloquence of impassioned feeling. Hence his writings display a reach and variety of imagery, a depth of light and shadow, a vigour of thought, and an extent of illustration to which there is nothing comparable in any other writer, ancient or modern, with whom we are acquainted" (*Blackwood's Magazine*, xxxii. 217). It was probably that passage which made Tennyson call the hero of his *Locksley Hall* the "Heir of all the Ages." The expression occurs in the verses recalling the *René* of Chateaubriand, and *René*, of course, was Chateaubriand himself.

The phrase, the "Heir of all the Ages," is the equivalent in Tennyson's mind of Coleridge's fine summarisation—"We are not so much an age of our own as the quintessence of all past ages" (*Maximilian*, *Blackwood's Magazine*, January 1822), and embodies the idea that our civilisation is the sifted intellect of all the epochs, the rich deposit of all the former efforts of mankind. The phrase applies peculiarly to such men of large brain and comprehensive outlook on the world as Browning in poetry and George Meredith in prose romance. Only men of versatility of thought and talent can be said to be included in this Heirship of all the Ages. Such

men may not be great in single points like Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Plato, or Bacon; but having assimilated the teaching and art and mode of looking at the world through the mind of those supreme makers of civilisation, they have become co-heirs of their greatness. Goethe is the most outstanding Continental exemplar of the Heirship of the Ages; his culture included something of all the great ones of the past.

And Tennyson is one of the Heirs of all the Ages. He has a large outlook upon the world and great versatility of talent cherished and enriched by a wide acquaintance of the thinking of the Past. His art of expression owes something to almost every one of his predecessors in poetry, Greek, Latin, French, and German, as well as English; he has creaped them all for phrases and imagery.

Tennyson's versatility of talent is shown in the number of poems on so many diverse subjects which he treats so well and beautifully, and to which he gives a new turn of the kaleidoscope of the imagination. His variety of subject, and his ability to handle almost every kind of metre are astonishing. When seemingly exhausted in one department of subjects, he excelled in others. One of the criticisms of his *Idylls of the King*—that by Mr. J. M. Ludlow in *Macmillan's Magazine* for November 1859—had an important effect in making Tennyson turn to new subjects. The writer complained that Tennyson as a poet was too idealistic. He said, "There is yet room amongst us, surely, for a poet who, in plain but not too archaic Saxon, choosing some subject

not too alien from ordinary sympathies, should know how to go straight home to the hearts of the great mass of his countrymen, by broad pictures of human pathos, and clear exhibitions of lofty purpose. Mr. Tennyson has been hitherto, except in a few flashes here and there, rather a teacher of teachers, a poet of poets, than such a writer as I have described. That he cannot show himself such yet, no one would dare to pronounce who measures the marvellous growth in power, in depth, in mastery of every sort, over feeling, thought, style, which is evinced by a comparison of the *Lady of Shalott* with the same subject *Elaine*."

This challenge to become a Poet of the People influenced Tennyson; he now undertook to write some Idylls of the Hearth, as he at first proposed to call them, and published them in his next volume, put forth in 1864. Mr. Waugh has given in his *Life of Tennyson* (p. 193) an ingenious reason for the poet's abandonment, for the time being, of idealistic themes for homely subjects. He asserts it was due to a passing phase of decadence in poetry in which poets had sunk to choose "the most sordid and valueless themes" and laboured under a contaminating atmosphere, and that Tennyson in consequence was "surrounded by a very depressing fog of prejudice and convention." But this origin of the change is quite fanciful. Tennyson sometimes profited from the advice of his critics, as a perusal of the criticisms on his poems as they appeared will testify.

The new volume, *Enoch Arden and Other Poems*,

consisted of *Enoch Arden*, *Aylmer's Field*, *Sea Dreams*, *The Grandmother*, *The Northern Farmer*, old style; *Tithonus*, *The Voyage*, *In the Valley of Canterels*; *The Flower*, *Requiescat*, *The Sailor Boy*, *The Islet*, *The Kinglet*, *A Welcome to Alexandra*, 7th March, 1863; *A Dedication*, "Dear, near, and true." *Experiments*, *Boädicea*; *In Quantity*, *Milton*; *Heendecasyllabics*; *Specimen of a Translation of the Iliad in Blank Verse*.

If Tennyson had published nothing but this volume of verse he would still be considered one of the best English poets of his century. Nearly every piece is of value as representative of some side of Tennyson's activity. Tennyson was now at the zenith of his career. We may consider the period between 1855 and 1868 as the time he was at his best. Before 1855 his work was too luxuriant; after 1868, when he wrote the *Holy Grail*, he was less fertile in originality than he had been between 1830 and 1868. The poems contained in the volume had accumulated during the composition of his great work, *The Idylls of the King*. *Sea Dreams* had appeared in *Macmillan's Magazine* for January 1860. *Tithonus* was contributed to the *Cornhill Magazine* for February 1860. *The Sailor Boy* was published in the *Victoria Regia*, 1861. *The Welcome to Alexandra* was issued in March 1863, and the *Experiments in Metres* appeared in the *Cornhill Magazine* for December 1863. The volume was one of the most popular of Tennyson's publications, sixty thousand copies being sold in a very short time (*Mem.* ii. 6). *Enoch Arden* and *Aylmer's Field* were repeatedly translated into

foreign tongues. The following is a list of the German translations and their editions of *Enoch Arden*:—1. By R. Schellwien, 1867; 2. R. Waldmüller, 1869, 1875, 1880, 1883, 1883, 1885, 1891, 1892, 1892, and 1893; 3. F. W. Weber, 1869, 1878; 4. H. A. Feldmann, 1870, 1872, 1880; 5. C. Hessel, 1873; 6. A. Strodtmann, 1876, 1881, 1891; 7. C. Eichholz, 1881; 8. H. Griebenow, 1889; M. Mendheim, 1893; Waldmüller's translation seems to be the favourite, to judge from the number of editions. *Aylmer's Field* was translated by—1. H. A. Feldmann, 1870; 2. F. W. Weber, 1869; 3. H. Griebenow, 1893; 4. E. V. Zenker, 1893 (*Mem.* ii. 530). These translations show that *Enoch Arden* and *Aylmer's Field* were two of the most popular of Tennyson's poems in Germany. In England the volume was one of the fastest selling of Tennyson's works. Longfellow's *Hiawatha* sold one hundred thousand in two years, and was perhaps the most popular of American poems. *Enoch Arden* must have exceeded this.

As a piece of versification *Enoch Arden* is one of Tennyson's triumphs in blank verse. It is as good in its homely way as *Lancelot and Elaine* and *Guinevere* are in theirs. When, too, Tennyson stepped down from painting the Ideal Man, the semi-Christ, in King Arthur, to the ideal poor man in *Enoch Arden*, he only showed how great he was. For the one is the counterpart of the other; and Tennyson, in depicting his hero has put him in circumstances necessary to bring out the highest self-sacrifice that it is possible for a man to make. The

passage describing Enoch returned unknown, seeing through the window his own daughter

“A later but a loftier Annie Lee,”

a living portrait of his own wife when she was his sweetheart, is one of the finest touches in the whole range of poetry. Here Tennyson attains to the great simplicity and pathos of Sophocles. The resemblance of Enoch's career to Arthur's is obvious in that both are supplanted in their affections and have to endure the most poignant of human grief in consequence. Tennyson then painted Enoch Arden as a hero, and hence the words,

“So passed the strong heroic soul away.”

Some of Tennyson's critics have found fault with him for having resorted to the Arthurian legend for the material on which to found his teachings of life, holding that the world he paints in the *Idylls of the King* is too unreal for modern acceptance. The production of *Enoch Arden*, however, proves that Tennyson was not wholly dependent upon purely ideal subjects and scenery to exhibit his view of life. His depiction of common life in poetical colours is as good as his painting of ideal worlds. While he could produce modern antiques of superb quality, *Enone*, *Tithonus*, the *Idylls of the King*,—he could also write *Idylls of the Hearth* equal to anything in Crabbe or Wordsworth. His *May Queen* and *Enoch Arden* stand high among this *genre* of poem. There are two blemishes, it must be confessed, in *Enoch Arden*: the passage describing Enoch's “ocean-spoil”

is just a little over elaborate for a homely poem, and the two last lines could have been dispensed with.

In *Sea Dreams* Tennyson rises to a more imaginative height than in *Enoch Arden*; it is Tennyson's version of the Ever-Womanly. A city clerk whose savings have been swept away by his trusting to an oily-tongued speculator, and his wife, have withdrawn to the coast for a holiday to recruit. The cheat to which he has been subjected rankles in the heart of the clerk, but his wife pleads with him to forgive the rascal, who has been a hypocrite, a church member taking advantage of his position to rob the widow. The decadent Christianity reappears in the dream of the wife, who sees the headlands as

"Huge cathedral fronts of every age,  
Grave, florid, stern, as far as eye could see,  
One after one; and then the great ridge drew,  
Lessening to the lessening music, back,  
And passed into the belt and swell'd again  
Slowly to music: ever when it broke  
The statues, king or saint, or founder fell;  
Then from the gaps and chasms of ruin left  
Came men and women in dark clusters round,  
Some crying, "Set them up! they shall not fall!"  
And others, "Let them lie, for they have fall'n."

Then I fixt

My wistful eyes on two fair images,  
Both crown'd with stars and high among the stars,—  
The Virgin Mother standing with her child  
High on one of those dark minster fronts—  
Till she began to totter, and the child  
Clung to the mother, and sent out a cry  
Which mixt with little Margaret's, and I woke  
And my dream awed me."



Thus Tennyson depicts in mystical language the downfall of the creeds much in the same way as Matthew Arnold does in *Obermann Once More* as a shattered iceberg on fragments of which some men still drift on the stream of Time. But Tennyson adds to the picture the idea of the Virgin and the Child as the permanent principle of Christianity which is to survive the crashing of the creeds or temporary forms of faith. And the Virgin and the Child of Catholicism as a poetic conception is made to melt into the wife and the child of the city clerk, for she is the incarnation of the Redemptive principle of Religion. The poet probably had in view Frederick Robertson's sermon on the glory of the Virgin Mother, preached 23rd January 1853, in writing *Sea Dreams*.

*Aylmer's Field*, next to *Enoch Arden* and *Sea Dreams*, the most important piece in the volume of 1864, is one of the most strongly didactic of all Tennyson's poems. Exception has often been taken to its declamatory nature by Tennyson's biographers and critics. Mr. Luce, for instance, says "*Aylmer's Field* is a more powerful poem than *Enoch Arden*, but not less open to criticism as a work of art. It is somewhat unequal and has most of the faults whose opposites are the chief beauties of the other work. *Enoch Arden* was a story, told as such, and but for an occasional weakness, well told; in *Aylmer's Field* we have a story and too much beside. And it is a remarkable fact, but only one among several of the same kind, that in nearly all of these poems in which the poet takes occasion to speak for himself, and

therefore to speak in tones that are reprehensibly loud and strong, he not only denounces some abuse of the day, but also drags in a foreign nation. Here, again, he condemns the marriage-hindering mammon, and here, as in most of the contemporary poems—the *Princess* and *In Memoriam*, for example—the French come on the scene to receive the poet's censure" (Tennyson, "Temple" Classics, pp. 57-58). Notwithstanding such animadversions, *Aylmer's Field* is one of Tennyson's triumphs in verse. Tennyson never proclaimed himself a non-didactic poet. "Art for art's sake" was not his poetical creed. He occasionally took up the rôle of William Cowper to lecture his countrymen on their social shortcomings, and in *Aylmer's Field* he has done this in the manner of the author of the *Task*.

*The Northern Farmer* and *The Grandmother*, two of Tennyson's dialect poems, also illustrate Tennyson's many-sidedness. The two poems have a grit of their own; they savour of the countryside. They show that Tennyson had a considerable dramatic gift in entering into the nature of common men untouched by culture, a dramatic gift such as Burns displays in his *Jolly Beggars*. *In the Valley of Caunteretz* is Tennyson's solitary poem in the heroic couplet, reminiscent of Arthur Hallam. *The Northern Farmer* was written in February 1861, "All Along the Valley" in August of the same year. *The Voyage* and *The Sailor Boy* are two of Tennyson's best sea lyrics; he was as fond of singing of the wonders of the sea as of the beauties of nature.

It is instructive to read the criticisms on Tenny-

son's volumes in the several magazines. As he slowly attained to the premiership among English poets a good many retractions of former biting sarcasms had to be made by the authoritative organs. *Blackwood* of November 1864 is a polite admission of all Tennyson's greatness. The reviewer, it is true, cannot understand *Sea Dreams*, which he abandons to some German philosopher of the future to interpret; *The Voyage* is said to have half a dozen possible meanings. The three last lines of *Enoch Arden* are condemned as spoiling the poem; but *Aylmer's Field* is praised highly, although the sermon is pronounced impossible. The translation of Homer's starry night is compared with and ranked above Pope's paraphrase. The whole volume, though placed lower than the two idylls of the King—i.e., *Elaine* and *Guinevere*—is welcomed as a good addition to English poetry.

While Tennyson was engaged publishing the *Enoch Arden* volume in 1864 Garibaldi came on a visit to Farringford, and planted a Wellingtonia in the garden as a memento of his stay. Tennyson was always an enthusiast for Italian freedom (*Mem.* ii. 1). Next year the poet lost his mother, whom he had celebrated in his early piece *Isabel*, and in a well-known passage in *The Princess*. In the same year a tour to Germany was made, taking Waterloo on the route. He visited Weimar, and saw with a melancholy interest the relics of Goethe, and then proceeded to Leipzig and Dresden. Tennyson has not recorded in any of his poems the feelings that came over him on seeing the old medieval cities of

Germany. He seems to have been, unlike Longfellow, unresponsive to the German spirit. He was not a Romanticist of the early period of the Romantic Movement, but a Neo-Romanticist, in whom the classical and romantic are closely blended. And so the old cathedrals and cities of crooked streets did not appeal to him. He fell back, on the contrary, on a classical theme, and wrote *Lucretius* (October 1865), which Mr. Luce regards as his masterpiece (*Tennyson*, p. 60). It is at least a powerful poem.

In 1867 Tennyson had a visit from Bayard Taylor, the American poet and translator of *Faust*. In the same year was purchased "Black-horse Copse," near Haslemere, a high-lying piece of ground overlooking the Surrey plains. Tennyson re-named it Aldworth, and Mr. Knowles (the Editor of *The Nineteenth Century*), then an architect, built a house for the poet. The foundation-stone was laid on the 23rd April, the birthday of Shakespeare (*Mem.* ii. 54). Next year Tennyson had a visit from Longfellow in July (1868). A tour to Switzerland with Frederick Locker-Lampson was made in June and July 1869. In December Trinity College (Cambridge) made Tennyson an Honorary Fellow (*Mem.* ii. 89). Another visit to Paris was undertaken in 1872, when he bought many volumes of Victor Hugo and Alfred De Musset. The Tennysons went on to Grenoble and Geneva, and returned by Lausanne and Amiens (*Mem.* ii. 114-115).

Tennyson in 1873, by royal command, went to Windsor and had a conversation with the Queen, who took him into the castle and explained every-

thing to him. He was offered a baronetcy, but hesitated to accept it. He made the curious proposition that the honour might be conferred upon his eldest son instead of on himself (*Mem.* ii. 145). The offer was repeated in the end of 1874 by Disraeli. Tennyson and his son were, in September 1873, at the Italian Lakes (*Mem.* ii. 148), returning by the Simplon Pass and Neufchâtel (*Mem.* ii. 149). Tennyson had always a suspicion of the French, and yet, by a strange fatality, he was extremely fond of travelling on French soil. The Tennysons were again in Paris in the summer of 1874 (*Mem.* ii. 157), and saw some of Molière's plays acted by the Coquelins and Mdle. Reichemberg. Mrs. Tennyson and Lionel were left at Tours, and Tennyson and Hallam went south to the Pyrenees, a favourite spot with the poet, full of early associations, where he visited Caunteretz, the scene of

“All along the valley,”

for the third time (*Mem.* ii. 159).

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE DRAMAS.

THE critics and biographers of Tennyson are pretty much agreed that his dramas are inferior work compared with what he has done in idyll and lyric. Some even go the length of condemning the whole series of dramas as a mistaken undertaking, and look upon the ten years he spent in writing them as *avasted* time. None of them, however, demonstrate very clearly wherein he failed as a dramatist. Some of them confess their inability to specify what a drama should be, and their adverse opinion amounts to mere dislike of the subjects chosen by the poet.

A five-act drama is the highest species of literary composition, in which several characters, introduced upon the stage as acting and speaking in real life, so comport themselves that they exhibit their natures, habits, prepossessions, and prejudices, and, in the friction of conversation, call forth an exhibition of the nature, habits, prepossessions, and prejudices of the other characters with whom they come into contact. In the first act the writer lays the situation of his drama by making two or three of the *dramatis personæ* appear upon the scene and discuss in an agitated manner some public or private event, which

has taken place or some decree about to be promulgated which will threaten the liberties of the public or embroil private individuals in ruin or scandal. By implicating some of the individuals introduced upon the stage or their friends or accomplices not yet brought upon the boards, the dramatist enlists our sympathy for those about to suffer, or rouses our indignation against some aggressor. This is the object of the first act. The second act now brings in some modification of this by introducing upon the scene some of the opposing faction. Some of the aggressors or tyrants are portrayed, and friction between the virtuous and the vicious is begun. Here the dramatist delineates the other side with such artistic skill and in such a manner as to make us for the time being suspend our judgment on the merits of the aggressor; for the power to enter into and portray the mind and characters of all sorts and conditions of men is the quintessence of the dramatic art. In the third act the action culminates; the aggression threatened in the first act and discharging itself in the second brings on its consequences, and we behold the virtuous hero or heroine of the piece under the iron heel of the tyrant, yet not conquered, but defiant of Fate. In the fourth act new characters are introduced, which complicate the problem, but open a door of escape and give some hope that the tyranny may be baffled. The fifth act should be short, sharp, and sure. The oppressor is convicted out of his own words; the tyrant is suddenly removed, or some favourable stroke of good fortune not anticipated in the previous acts relieves the

situation. The characters of a drama must mirror each other in their speech, appearance, and behaviour, and their past life as well as their present existence should be revealed, and sometimes their future indicated. A five-act drama should be acted in two and a half to three hours, and if it exceeds this very much, and has to be cut down for acting, it transgresses the natural limit of the theatre. Overcrowding the stage by introducing too many characters must be avoided.

A drama may also be divided into three acts, but plays so constructed are of a lighter build than the five-act drama. Molière's *L'École des Maris* and *L'École des Femmes* illustrate the difference between the three and the five-act play.

Tennyson had already shown that he could portray dramatically in *The Northern Farmer* and such sketches the characters of people through their own speech, and he had been interesting himself in the purely dramatic form of composition before writing his first drama, *Queen Mary*. His gravitation to the stage was natural, a phase of his own development.

*Queen Mary* Tennyson opens with a scene in which subordinate characters discuss the merits of the principal personages of the drama. This pitches the play in a fine low key to begin with, and leaves room for the development of the characterization. Goethe adopted this method in his *Egmont*, one of the best representatives of the modern play permeated with the historic sense. The subject discussed is the question of the legitimacy of the Queen and the Princess Elizabeth, which gives a good opportunity



to introduce the state of parties. In the fourth scene the character of Philip of Spain, and the Queen's anxiety about the rumours regarding his moral character, become the topic of conversation, and the question of policy whether Mary should marry Philip and offend France, or marry Courtenay, is now the motive of the drama. So far Tennyson has managed well, and the number of *dramatis personæ* is not overwhelming. If Tennyson had confined himself to this motive, he would have been able to write his drama within the limits allowable in dramatic composition; but the Reformation demanded a disproportionate amount of attention, and he enlarged and enlarged as he went along in the succeeding acts until *Queen Mary* became a chronicle play longer than Prosper Merimée's *La Jacquerie*, and with as many characters as George Eliot's *Middlemarch*. Act II. is taken up with the rebellion of Wyatt, and some of the speeches are too long, one of the Queen's running to eighty lines. The act ends with Mary triumphant, exclaiming,

"My foes are at my feet and I am queen."

The Third Act introduces Stafford as conspiring against Mary, and the controversy of Catholic *versus* Protestant, and the burnings. The Protestant propaganda is called the "New Learning," and the Papal Legate, Cardinal Pole, represents Rome. The long scenes 3 and 4 are a heavy burden upon the movement of the piece, although fine as historical chronicle. A passage in scene 5, in which Bedingfield and Elizabeth hold converse, and the latter makes

Objection to Bedingfield's smelling boots, is clumsily introduced. Act IV., dealing with Cranmer's martyrdom, depicts the beginning of Mary's unpopularity. The fifth act is also too long. Instead of drawing together the threads of the story in a concise manner, it hangs too much upon the destruction of Cardinal Pole, charged with heresy by the new Pope, and other matters. The play seems to be written to depict the glory of England in its first stage of greatness as opposed to Spain, which lords over the world; and this is skilfully done. In another sense the play seems to have been composed as a picture of the triumph of Protestantism over Roman Catholicism and a foreshadowing of the grandeur of Elizabeth; or it seems to be written against marriages of state policy, for it depicts Mary's union with Philip as a disastrous failure. The play is a fine representation of the days preceding the

"Spacious times of great Elizabeth,"

although Tennyson has not been successful perhaps in recalling the feeling of the age predicted. Some of the characterizations are good. Philip is

"Stone-hearted, ice-cold—no dash or daring in him."

—Act I., scene 5.

Courtenay is a "Prince of fluff and feather" (Act I., scene 4). Bagenhall is a fairly drawn character, and the death of Lady Jane Grey, described in a dialogue between Bagenhall and Stafford in Act III., scene 1, is a most pathetic incident. This is the most moving passage in the play; and the speech of Lady Clarence

(Act V., scene 5) on Happiness is the most poetical touch.

Tennyson kept himself well in hand in *Queen Mary*, and did not overadorn. His fault was trying to write in a single play what should have been done in two dramas, and which, with another on the times of Queen Elizabeth, might have made a trilogy of the age of the Reformation resembling Schiller's *Wallenstein*, which is in reality a dramatic epic of the Thirty Years' War. The two first acts ending with the defeat of Wyatt might have been expanded into a single play, and Acts III., IV., and V. would of themselves have formed a single drama. The third play might have ended with the defeat of the Spanish Armada, completing the idea forecasted in the last act of the present play. Tennyson actually projected the play closing with the defeat of the Armada (Luce, p. 135). As it is, the action of *Queen Mary* is too large for a single drama, too small for a trilogy. And hence the reason of the unsatisfactory feeling on perusing it, and also the reason why Tennyson has so much exceeded the natural length of the drama in writing *Queen Mary*.

Tennyson, of course, was a close student of the periods of history he undertook to dramatise, and in *Queen Mary* he has drawn the different movements of the times with a masterly hand. He was loudly congratulated by J. Anthony Froude on the completion of the drama, who wrote: "You have given us the greatest of all your works" (*Mem.* ii. 181). Browning wrote: "Conception, execution, the whole and the parts, I see nowhere the shade of a fault"

<sup>2</sup>(*Mem.* ii. 181). And Gladstone wrote in similar flattering terms. The play, however, was not exactly a success on the boards: it had a brief representation in April 1876, Irving taking the part of Philip.

Before writing his next drama Tennyson studied many modern plays and refreshed his mind with the works of Æschylus and Sophocles (*Mem.* ii. 188). In choosing Harold for his next subject of dramatic treatment Tennyson took a theme admirably suited to his genius and his love of English history. As a piece of literature *Harold* is the most compact of all his works cast in the dramatic shape. Here again Tennyson aired some of his own pet views. In the desertion of Edith by Harold for Aldwyth and his marriage of state policy, Tennyson had another word against marriages not founded on love, but cemented by worldly considerations, a repetition of one of the motives of *Locksley Hall*, *Aylmer's Field*, and *Queen Mary*. The second act of *Harold* is one of the most powerful pieces of dramatic composition of the century. The scene in which Harold is made by William the Norman to take the oath to uphold his right to the English throne is equal to anything in the Greek drama for forcibleness of presentation. The fifth act, which is too long for a closing act, repeats the device of Scott's description of the battle in *Ivanhoe*. Edith, who is overcome by prostration, listens to an account of the battle given by an eyewitness viewing it afar. This saves much detail and multiplication of scenes and shifting of the scenery on the stage. But *Harold* has never been acted; it seems to be regarded as unfit for stage representa-

tion. It is a play of doom; from the opening scene, in which a comet in the sky is supposed to portend misfortunes to the English king, we feel that there is no way out of the catastrophe.

*Becket*, the most dramatic of all Tennyson's plays, was commenced in 1876, but not produced upon the stage until 1893. It was suggested to Tennyson as the subject of a drama by the critic who wrote the article on *Queen Mary* in *Blackwood* for September 1875. The writer, feeling dissatisfied with Tennyson's first play, hazarded the opinion that in *Becket* he would find a theme more worthy of his powers than *Mary Tudor*. This was the second time Tennyson took the advice of one of his critics.

The play opens with a Prologue, and consists of five acts. The prologue itself is too long, and the first act is double the length it should have been. The two leading characters, Becket and Henry, are represented in the prologue as playing at a game of chess, in which Becket, checkmating, wins, and the King knocks up the board and upsets all the men. This little incident is an admirable commencement of the drama, serving the same purpose as the comet in *Harold*, to present a vivid idea before the audience, forecasting the action of the drama. After Henry has made Becket Archbishop of Canterbury, and the latter becomes antagonistic to the schemes of the monarch, we have a powerful presentation of the headlong characters of both Henry and Becket, ending in the withdrawal of the latter to France, where he takes refuge with Louis. Rosamund is introduced in the second act, and the jealousy of

Queen Eleanor of Henry's paramour forms one of the important motives of the play; for Rosamund, being protected by Becket, is one of the channels by which the queen's wrath discharges itself against Becket. In the second act, too, Louis of France makes his appearance, and swings the action in a different direction from that of the two previous acts; and Walter Map is an important character, whose speeches (in prose) contain some of the most telling passages of the piece. Act III. develops the story of Rosamund, and at the close Becket and Henry are, for the time being, reconciled. Act IV. is concerned with the discovery of Rosamund's bower by Queen Eleanor, and in the meeting of the two women we have their characters clashing. In the fifth act, which, like the first, is too long, we have the catastrophe brought about by the four friends of the King, Sir Reginald Fitzurse and his brother knights De Brito, De Tracy, and De Morville, representatives of the rough-and-ready Englishmen of the times who were not much influenced by the Church. The portrayal of the character of Becket in this act is highly dramatic. Tennyson has been able to project himself into the mind of the champion of the Church against the monarchy with an insight and sympathy leaving nothing to be desired. In this respect Tennyson, in this play, rises equal to any other dramatist who has chosen a historical subject for his action demanding a certain rigid adherence to the preconceived opinion of a great historical character and who has at the same time made his character a creation. In this respect Tennyson's *Becket* must

hold a respectable place among the dramas of kind. Racine's *Athalie* is the French masterpiece of this genre, and *Becket* may be ranked alongside it.

"As a stage tragedy (adapted by Irving)," says the *Memoir*, "Irving has told us that *Becket* is one of the three most successful plays produced by him at the Lyceum. '*Becket* is a finer play than *King John*,'" he wrote to Tennyson. The play, of course, being too long, had to be cut by Irving, but had a successful run of over fifty nights. (*Mem.* ii. 195-6.)

An able article in the *Nineteenth Century* for February 1893 by Agnes Lambert, points out that Tennyson's drama is one of the best historical appreciations of Becket. He views the Archbishop "from the standpoint of the twelfth century, when one faith governed all, and the appeal to Rome, the centre of it, was the sole safety of the millions of Christendom from the rapacity, and worse, the unbridled passion of tyrants." The article quotes another in the *Pall Mall Gazette* of 11th December 1884, which says that Tennyson failed to paint Becket's transition from a statesman to a churchman. This, no doubt, is a defect from a Browningite point of view, but Tennyson is not a Shakespearian dramatist, nor instigated by the psychological method of Browning. He belongs, as I have said, rather to the Racine type of dramatists in whom the gorgeous spectacle of historical characters speaking in an irreproachable vocabulary are made to live again. *Queen Mary*, *Harold*, *Becket* must all be ranked in this category of drama.

The *Falcon*, Tennyson's next play, was produced

by Mr. and Mrs. Kendal in December 1879 and had a run of sixty-seven nights. It is characterised by Fanny Kemble as "an exquisite little poem in action." As literature, apart from its dramatic capabilities, the *Falcon* is a very skilful piece of composition. There is no action in the play, the whole consisting of a series of reminiscences introduced into the dialogue by means of which the past history of the two chief characters is told. This of itself is a great achievement in poetical composition, and the *Falcon* as a story has rare attractions, although its motive is not weighty enough for a drama of any length.

The *Cup* was written immediately after the *Falcon* in 1880. Tennyson had given Irving his *Becket* to put upon the boards; but Irving, though regarding that play as magnificent, said it would cost three thousand pounds to mount it, and that he could not afford the risk (*Mem.* ii. 259). Irving asked something shorter, and Tennyson wrote the *Cup*, a play in two acts. The *Falcon* was perhaps also a trial play to see how far Tennyson would take as a dramatist. The *Cup* was produced at the Lyceum on 3rd January 1881 and ran for over one hundred and thirty nights, one of the most successful runs of modern times (*Mem.* ii. 258). Ellen Terry played Camma, and Irving took the part of Synorix. The subject of the *Cup* was got out of Plutarch and was suggested to Tennyson by a paragraph in Lecky's *History of European Morals*. In spite of its success on the stage, the *Cup* cannot be ranked a great play. It is a skilful piece of stagecraft, and sometimes a



skilful piece of stagecraft is a success, whereas a play profoundly dramatic in conception and an exquisite piece of literature would be a failure.

~~the *Memor*~~ *Promise of May*, produced at the Globe Theatre in November 1882, Tennyson depicts the intrusion of modern agnostic thought into English village life, through the character of a villain in love. At the third performance the Marquis of Queensberry rose, and, in the name of Free Thought, protested against "Mr. Tennyson's abominable caricature" (*Mem.* ii. 267). The drama continued to be played for five weeks, but the houses were thinning dreadfully before it was withdrawn. It was not the storm among the Freethinkers, however, which extinguished the *Promise of May*. The villain of the piece is placed in a most improbable situation. He is a metaphysical prevaricator with truth when reasoning out his own motives, and a liar to Farmer Dobson and the two girls with whom he is brought into contact. The motive of the piece is that Edgar is going to make Dora, the sister of his outraged former lover, love him under his assumed name of Harold, until she forgives him when he divulges to her that he is in reality the same Edgar who has cost her and her old father five years of wasting anguish. Says the villain of himself

"Well, then, I must make her  
Love Harold first, and then she will forgive  
Edgar for Harold's sake. She said herself  
She would forgive him by-and-bye, not now—  
For her own sake *then*, if not for mine—not now—  
But by-and-bye."

This is too subtle for the stage, and enough to account for the failure of the piece.

*The Foresters*, Tennyson's last play, was being composed in 1882 (*Mem.* ii. 271), but was not represented till the spring of 1892, when it was put on the boards in New York by Augustin Daly, who had visited Tennyson in the autumn of 1891. Sir Arthur Sullivan had set the songs to music. The house was packed the first night and the play had a run of six weeks or more (*Mem.* ii. 395-7). Miss Ada Rehan played Maid Marian and Mr. John Drew was Robin Hood. Irving lent his theatre for an English copyright performance on the 17th March 1892, when Mr. Acton Bond appeared as Robin Hood and Miss Violet Vanbrugh as Maid Marian (*Waugh's Life of Tennyson*, p. 290). Mr. Waugh says of *The Foresters*: "It should be regarded as a masque, as a pastoral play for a summer's afternoon in the woods, an echo of Mediævalism when thought was free and art unfettered." (*Life of Tennyson*, p. 293).

To sum up the character of Tennyson's dramas *Queen Mary* should have been the first two plays of a Trilogy; it is too long for a single play. The *Cup*, again, is too short, and the catastrophe comes too closely upon the first act; it would have made a better drama with an act, suspending the action, between Acts I. and II. The *Falcon* is the most finished piece of literature among all the dramas; but *Harold* and *Becket* are Tennyson's two dramatic masterpieces.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE AFTERMATH.

TENNYSON varied his life at Aldworth with occasional dips into London from 1875 to 1882, principally about the Easter season (*Mem.* ii. 222). He had his old friends FitzGerald and the rest occasionally with him. In September 1876 his son Hallam and he visited old Fitz at Woodbridge (*Mem.* ii. 213); and in October they were with the Gladstones at Hawarden, when Gladstone and he talked of Dante, the Income Tax, "modern morality, the force of public opinion, the evils of materialism, and the new Biblical Criticism," the latter being probably Colenso's views (*Mem.* ii. 215). In January 1877 Tennyson was invited to the unveiling of the Burns monument at Glasgow, which he had to decline, though he had "as much veneration for the poet as if I had been born a Scotchman" (*Mem.* ii. 216). Another pleasure at this period was a letter from Lord Lytton, then in India, thanking the poet for dedicating *Harold* to him. (*Mem.* ii. 216.) In March 1877 he wrote the sonnet *Montenegro*, which he regarded his best sonnet; and in June he had a letter from Victor Hugo, thanking him for the sonnet addressed to the latter after Lionel had visited Paris.

On 28th February 1878 Lionel was married to Eleanor, the daughter of Frederick Locker (*Mem.* ii. 221). Lionel was in the India Office. It was mostly to be near Lionel that the Tennysons stayed in London during the spring months of 1875-1882. They made many new acquaintances about this time (*Mem.* ii. 222), and often enjoyed the company of their old acquaintances. Among his friends at this period Tennyson was frequently with Browning, Leslie Stephen, Jebb, Miss Thackeray, and Dean Stanley (*Mem.* ii. 230-31), and the Carlyles, to whom he often read his poems (*Mem.* ii. 233). In 1875 he had a visit from Renan. In the spring of 1879 Tennyson lost his favourite brother Charles (Charles Tennyson Turner), who died at Cheltenham on 25th April; and on 20th May Mrs. Charles Tennyson Turner, sister of Mrs. Tennyson, followed her husband. Charles Tennyson Turner had been vicar of Grasby, and had during his life written many beautiful sonnets; indeed, he is one of England's finest masters of the sonnet. A collection of these<sup>a</sup> sonnets was published in 1880.

In March, 1880, Tennyson was asked to stand for the Lord Rectorship of Glasgow University; but, on learning that it was as nominee of the Conservative party he declined the honour (*Mem.* ii. 243). After the death of his brother Charles the poet was unwell, and went by order of Sir Andrew Clark on tour to the Continent. His son Hallam accompanied him, and they visited Venice, going *via* Munich and the Tyrol. From Venice they passed on to Verona, and at Sermio, with memories of Catullus in mind,

Tennyson wrote his *Frater Ave atque Vale*. His volume of miscellaneous pieces called *Ballads and Poems* was published in 1880, containing the tragic poems, *The First Quarrel* and *Rispa* and *The Sisters*; also *The Northern Cobbler*, a character sketch almost as good as *The Northern Farmer*; *The Story of the Revenge*, a ballad celebrating the heroic deeds of Sir Richard Grenville; and the splendid siege piece, *The Defence of Lucknow*, in which Tennyson rivals Homer as a painter of battle. Regarding this poem Tennyson said: "The old flag, used during the defence of the Residency, was hoisted on the Lucknow flagstaff by General Wilson, and the soldiers who still survived from the siege were all mustered on parade in honour of this poem when my son Lionel visited Lucknow. A tribute overwhelmingly touching" (*Mem.* ii. 254). The volume contained, besides these poems, *Sir John Oldcastle*, *Lord Cobham*, *Columbus*, *The Voyage of Maeldune*, and *De Profundis*, and a few translations and short pieces. *The Voyage of Maeldune* is Tennyson's contribution to the Celtic Renaissance.

Next year died James Spedding, one of Tennyson's oldest friends, whose loss was deeply mourned by the poet. In August, 1882, Tennyson and his son Hallam visited Dovedale, which Tennyson pronounced one of the most unique and delicious places in England (*Mem.* ii. 266). In 1883 FitzGerald died—"old Fitz" as Tennyson used to call him—another valued friend of the poet's young days. In September of the same year Tennyson and Gladstone went a cruise with Sir Donald Currie in the

*Pembroke Castle* among the Western Islands, and thence to Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. At Kirkwall Tennyson and Mr. Gladstone received the freedom of the burgh, Mr. Gladstone returning thanks for both. At Copenhagen the Kings of Denmark and Greece with their Queens, with the Czar and Czarina came on board, and Tennyson read by request the Bugle Song of *The Princess*, and *The Grandmother* (*Mem.* ii. 283). On the *Pembroke Castle* Tennyson was broached on the acceptance of a peerage, and after some reluctance he accepted it (*Mem.* ii. 298). Sir Edward Hamley and Mr. Locker Lampson visited Aldworth in November (1883), and Tennyson and Sir Edward discussed *The Charge of the Heavy Brigade*, which had been published in *Macmillan's Magazine* for March, 1882 (*Mem.* ii. 297). In December of the same year Tennyson's elder son was engaged to Miss Audrey Boyle (married 25th June, 1884). The poet took his seat in the House of Lords in March, 1884, and sat on the cross benches. He gave a vote for the extension of the Franchise in July, 1884 (*Mem.* ii. 305), but he did not sit often in the House.

Tennyson's promotion to the peerage shows one of the defects of our Upper House. The hereditary principle of the House of Lords is modified by the constant accession of men who have become eminent in some department of literary or civil activity; but in many cases the promotion of these non-hereditary members is made at a time of life when they are in the decline of their physical powers and as a re-

cognition of the services of the past. The addition of wise heads to the House after the seventieth year is not always an accession of strength; men as legislators are past their best at sixty-five. If Tennyson had joined the Upper House twenty years before 1884 he might have been a prominent member. As it was, his promotion to the peerage was merely a deserved recognition of his place in literature and an honour done to the name of poet.

Tennyson published in *Macmillan's Magazine* for November, 1885, his poem called *Vastness*, one of the most sublime of his later productions. During the same year *Tiresias and other Poems* also appeared, containing *Despair*, *The Ancient Sage*, *Locksley Hall Sixty Years After*, and many other less important poems, the best products of his aftermath.

The consideration of Tennyson's poem, *Vastness*, raises the question of the theological position which he maintained throughout the whole of his life. Tennyson belonged to the Broad Church school of theology, the school founded by the writings of Erskine of Linlathen and Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection*, published in 1825, and carried to maturity by Frederick Denison Maurice and Frederick W. Robertson of Brighton. In *In Memoriam* Tennyson proclaimed himself the advocate of Honest Doubt and the Larger Hope. Honest Doubt was founded on Aphorisms XXIV. and XXV. of "Moral and Religious Aphorisms" of the *Aids to Reflection*, which run thus: "When there is a great deal of smoke and no clear flame, it argues much moisture in the matter, yet it witnesseth certainly that there

is fire there; and therefore dubious questioning is a much better evidence than that senseless deadness which most take for believing. Men that know nothing in sciences have no doubts. He never truly believed who was not made first 'sensible and convinced of unbelief. . . . Never be afraid to doubt, if only you have the disposition to believe, and doubt in order that you may end in believing the truth. I will venture to add in my own name and from my own conviction the following—Aphorism XXV. He who begins by loving Christianity better than truth, will proceed by loving his own sect or church better than Christianity, and end in loving himself better than all."

In this passage of Leighton and Coleridge we have the exact definition of what Tennyson meant by "Honest Doubt," and within the range of its definition he moved all his life. Hence his reference to Coleridge's axioms in *In Memoriam*, XCVI.:—

" You tell me, doubt is Devil born.  
I know not; one indeed I knew  
In many a subtle question versed  
Who touch'd a jarring lyre at first,  
But ever strove to make it true:

" Perplex in faith, but pure in deeds,  
At last he beat his music out.  
There lives more faith in honest doubt,  
Believe me, than in half the creeds."

Along with this Honest Doubt there is in Tennyson a general disbelief in the creeds; in the Prologue to *In Memoriam* we have this opinion.



" Our little systems have their day;  
 They have their day and cease to be:  
 They are but broken lights of thee,  
 And Thou, O Lord, art more than they."

This is repeated in *Sea Dreams*, where Tennyson describes the crumbling of the creeds; and in *Harold* we again have—

" Oh God ! I cannot help it, but at times  
 They seem to me too narrow, all the faiths  
 Of this grown world of ours, whose baby eye  
 Saw them sufficient."

—Act III., scene 2.

This is certainly too advanced for the age of Harold ; it is Tennyson's own conviction put into the mouth of Harold.

Tennyson's honest doubt and distrust of the creeds is not always confined to these academic statements. He occasionally puts them into concrete form. *Despair* caused some pangs to his friends when published in the *Nineteenth Century* in 1881. Some did not accept it as dramatic. The third stanza contains the germ of *Vastness*, given a few years afterwards.

" And the suns of the limitless universe  
 Sparkled and shone in the sky,  
 Flashing with fires as of God, but we  
 Knew that their light was a lie—  
 Bright as with deathless hope—but,  
 However they sparkled and shone,  
 The dark little worlds running round them  
 Were worlds of woe like our own—  
 No soul in the heaven above,  
 No soul on the earth below,  
 A fiery scroll written over  
 With lamentation and woe."

It is a curious fact that this brooding over the immensities is always accompanied by a questioning of the Immortality of the Soul; when space is explored by the telescope she can discover no god in the universe. The representative thinker of the modern world given up to measuring man the midget against the immensity of space is Pascal, and he was a born doubter. Tennyson in his poems, *Despair* and *Vastness*, has some poignant touches of doubt, and during the whole of his life he was concerned with the question of immortality. From his early youth, when he wrote his *Supposed Confessions* to the time when he published *In Memoriam* he was much engaged in reasoning out his scheme of belief in the Immortality of the Soul. Science, of course, was busy during this period changing our views of things, and it was assumed by many hard thinkers that her teachings annihilated the belief in the permanency of the soul. And Tennyson accordingly, along with Browning, tried to antagonise these pessimistic doctrines. After the composition of *In Memoriam* there was a lull for a time in the discussion of these questions in Tennyson's mind; but they broke out afresh in his later poetry.

Tennyson's attitude to science has been ably outlined by Mr. Knowles in the *Nineteenth Century* for 1893. While it is true as the writer proves that Tennyson had a rare and intimate knowledge of science and insight into scientific questions, it can scarcely be admitted that he accepted all the dictates of scientific men. On the contrary, he is sometimes opposed to science as in *Elegy No. 120 of In*

*Memoriam*, and hostile to it as in *The Promise of May*, in which he certainly depicted the leading male character as an agnostic and thinker touched with scientific thought.

Tennyson's later theological attitude often took a very gloomy hue. His poems, *Despair* and *Rizpah*, although written dramatically, contain some passages which cannot but be interpreted personally, for they have parallels in *Locksley Hall Sixty Years After*, which is a personal utterance of his later view of the world. Added to these gloomy views is distrust of the million. Tennyson was by nature a conservative, and in his later years he became afraid of the Revolutionary principles at work among the masses, whom he regarded as a prey to "the hustings liar." He has given expression to his worst fears in *Locksley Hall Sixty Years After*.

"Chaos, Cosmos! Cosmos, Chacs! once again the sickening  
game;  
Freedom, free to slay herself, and dying while they shout her  
name.  
Step by step we gained a freedom known to Europe, known to  
all;  
Step by step we rose to greatness—thro' the tonguesters we may  
fall.  
You that woo the Voices—tell them 'old experience is a fool.'  
Teach your flatter'd kings that only those who cannot read can  
rule.  
Pluck the mighty from their seat, but set no meek ones in their  
place;  
Pillory Wisdom in your markets, pelt your offal at her face.  
Tumble Nature heel o'erhead, and, yelling with the yelling  
street,  
Set the feet above the brain and swear the brain is in the feet.

Bring the old dark Ages back without the faith, without the hope  
Break the State, the Church, the Throne, and roll their ruins  
down the slope.

Authors—essayist, atheist, novelist, realist, rhymester, play your  
part,

Paint the moral shame of Nature with the living hues of Art."

It is evident that Tennyson's views of the social world in his late years is interconnected with his brooding over immensity as revealed by modern astronomy. But it is a question if this "Intoxication of the Infinite," as it has been finely called, is a symptom of the highest greatness, of the last achievement in culture. Minds of the very first order seldom give themselves up to measuring the race of man against immensity. Bacon, Coleridge, Goethe, for instance, are all permeated with the conception of the limitation of man's powers, and they do not brood over the immense and look upon the life of the human race as a midge-dance in the flight of time or "a trouble of ants in the gleam of a million million, of suns" (*Vastness*). Coleridge warned his students' in the *Aids to Reflection* against identifying the Idea of God with the "Material Sublime," the foundation of many errors and superstitions (*Preliminary to Elements of Religious Philosophy*). The identification of God with space lands us from the intellectual side of our nature in Pantheism and from the moral side of our being in pessimism. Hence Pascal, who was a moralist and rejected the identification of God with space, was a pessimist; and Spinoza, who, as a moralist, was an optimist, was a pantheist. Both were logically correct, but both were not minds of the very first order.

But if Tennyson did not attain in his last decades to the intellectual composure of Sophocles and Goethe and those others

“Who saw life steadily and saw it whole,”

and was, at certain times, under the pressure of the pessimism of his age, mostly provoked by the trend of politics, which had not brought that

“Cycle rich in good,”

dreamt of in his earlier years, he was still a weighty voice in the kingdom of culture, and the representative of the best thought of his time. He still nursed his large cosmopolitan programme of a federation among the nations, a universal peace promoted by the union of the Christian element in civilisation. Lord Tennyson was a patriot as well as a cosmopolitan, and the two, patriotism and cosmopolitanism, were united in him in a fine interfusion. He gave expression to their fusion in the *Epilogue* of *The Charge of the Heavy Brigade at Balaklava*. Tennyson had always been a patriotic Englishman, and had often come forth in verse with inspiring lyrics. In early days he had written “There is no land like England” and “Who fears to die? who fears to die?” both national war songs (published in 1832), and the former of which was incorporated in *The Foresters*. In the *Epilogue* to *The Charge of the Heavy Brigade* he says—

“Slav, Teuton, Kelt, I count them all  
My friends and brother souls,  
With all the peoples, great and small,  
That wheel between the poles.

But since our mortal shadow, Ill,  
 To waste the earth began—  
 Perchance from some abuse of Will  
 In worlds before the man

Involving ours—he needs must fight  
 To make true peace his own,  
 He needs must combat might with might,  
 Or Might would rule alone  
 And who loves War for War's own sake  
 Is fool, or crazed, or worse:  
 But let the patriot soldier take  
 His meed of fame in verse."

Tennyson's *Charge of the Light Brigade*, his *Defence of Lucknow*, and *The Ballad of the Revenge*, are among his best patriotic poems. In *The Defence of Lucknow* is a fine touch amid the description of all the horrors of war—the line in which he calls up the thought of England—

"Thoughts of the breezes of May blowing over  
 an English field "

The *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington*, 1852, is, however, the grandest pronouncement of Lord Tennyson's patriotic fervour, the patriotic fervour of a statesman rather than of a poet. The finest passage is the appeal to the politicians—

"O Statesmen, guard us, guard the eye, the soul  
 Of Europe, keep our noble England whole,  
 And save the one true seed of freedom sown  
 Betwixt a people and their ancient throne,  
 That sober freedom out of which there springs  
 Our loyal passion for our temperate kings;

For, saving that, ye help to save mankind  
Till public wrong be crumbled into dust,  
And drill the raw world for the march of mind,  
Till crowds at length be sane and crowns be just."

Tennyson in his early years had written in much the same strain about Freedom in his noble lines—

"Of old sat Freedom on the heights,"

and he had described England as

"A land of settled government,  
A land of just and old renown,  
Where Freedom slowly broadens down  
From precedent to precedent ;  
Where faction seldom gathers head,  
But by degrees to fulness wrought,  
The strength of some diffusive thought  
Hath time and space to work and spread."

Lord Tennyson continued to his latest years to hold this noble ideal of England and British freedom. His address to Freedom, published in *Macmillan's Magazine* for December 1884, echoes his earlier utterances.

In April 1886 Lord Tennyson lost his younger son Lionel, who had been in India on the invitation of Lord Dufferin in order to make himself acquainted with the country. He had contracted jungle fever, from the effects of which he never recovered, and died on the voyage home and was buried at sea. The loss was a sad one at Lord Tennyson's time of life. Lionel was a promising young man of exceptional abilities, and had contributed articles to

the *Saturday Review*. He had been married eight years at the time of his death.

In the autumn Lord Tennyson had visited Cromer, where the Locker-Lampsons stayed, had a sail on the Wroxham Broad, and arrived at Cambridge on 7th August, when he stayed at Trinity. Next year he went on a cruise on the *Stella*, the yacht of Sir Allen Young, round the south and south-west coast, visiting Tintagil and the King Arthur country. He landed at the cove where the mystic king is supposed to have been borne on the wave to the shore. Here Tennyson drank to the *Stella* and Arthur's return (*Mem.* ii. 341). From this the party crossed to the Channel Islands and paid a visit to Frederick Tennyson at St. Heliers. The two brothers had not met for years, and they had their talk about the by-gone days.

In the autumn of 1888 Lord Tennyson had a serious illness, rheumatic gout, which had been brought on by walking in a storm and getting drenched, and during the winter of 1888-9 he was confined to the house; but he recovered about the end of February (*Mem.* ii. 347-353). In May Lord Brassey lent Tennyson his yacht, the *Sunbeam*, and Hallam and he had another cruise on the south coast. On his eightieth birthday, 6th August 1889, Lord Tennyson was gratified by numerous tributes from Swinburne, Lewis Morris, Alfred Austen, Theodore Watts-Dunton, P. B. Aldrich, and others, and he planted a Colorado pine in the garden at Aldworth (*Mem.* ii. 359). About this time he commenced the second part of *Enone*. *Merlin and the*



*Glean* was composed in August 1889. In October he wrote *Crossing the Bar*, one of the most impressive of his lyrics, which he instructed to be the closing poem of all editions of his works (*Mem.* ii. 367). In December, he published *Demeter and other Poems*, containing *Demeter and Persephone*, *Merlin and the Glean*, *Romney's Remorse*, *The Ring*, and *Far, Far Away*, and other pieces. *Demeter and Persephone* is a glorification of motherhood, a subject Tennyson was fond of expounding, and Demeter's passion for her lost child is his noblest exposition of it. The volume was prefaced with a poem to the Marquis of Dufferin on the loss of Lionel, a touching prelude to *Demeter*.

The death of Browning in December 1889 greatly distressed Lord Tennyson. They had been friends during the whole of their latter life. No jealousy interfered with their intimacy, and they had congratulated each other on the publication of their several works. Although Browning is a greater metaphysician than Tennyson, he is not thereby to be reckoned a greater thinker. Browning has not the international outlook of Tennyson, and does not give expression to those hopes of federation and yearnings for a new Christianity that were favorite topics of the poet of *Locksley Hall*. If Browning was often more subtle and profound than Tennyson in the analysis of the thought and feeling of the individual, Tennyson was more deep in the diagnosis of the budding ideals of the race; and he had, what Browning had not, the art of expressing in a notable line or phrase some great truth necessary for the

time, which, as re-expressed in poetry, went forth to the world with all the weight and authority of a papal pronouncement.

The three last years of Tennyson's life were spent in quiet and leisurely ease, but he continued to write poems to the last, some of which showed little or no signs of intellectual enfeeblement. The *Death of Ænone* can scarcely be ranked as good as its predecessor of the early years, but it is a notable performance, indicating that Tennyson had still command over his chosen medium of expression, blank verse. The poems of this period are of a more hopeful nature than those issued between 1880 and 1889, and re-echo his favourite hopes for the peace of the world and the development of man and the individual in *The Dawn*, *The Making of Man*, *The Dreamer*, and *Mechanophilus*. He sings—

“ As we surpass our fathers' skill  
Our sons will shame our own ;  
A thousand things are hidden still,  
And not a hundred known.”

Lord Tennyson was at Farringford during the early summer of 1892, but on the 30th June he left for Aldworth. In September he was feeling ill ; and when Jowett came to visit him he asked the Master of Baliol not to argue with him on points of philosophy and religion, as was their wont. On the 29th September Sir Andrew Clark, the physician, was called in, though Hallam and he had driven that morning to Haslemere. He was able to listen to reading and conversation, and occasionally tried to

read his Shakespeare (*Mem.* ii. 425-6). He also took some interest in the forthcoming production of his *Becket* by Irving. In the afternoon of the 5th October he conversed freely with Sir Andrew Clark and Dr. Dabbs; but he was gradually sinking, and spoke his last words of farewell to Lady Tennyson and Hallam. The author of the *Memoir* (ii. 428) says:—"For the next hours the full moon flooded the room and the great landscape outside with light; and we watched in solemn stillness. His patience and quiet strength had power upon those who were nearest and dearest to him; we felt thankful for the love and the utter peace of it all; and his own lines of comfort from *In Memoriam* were strongly borne in upon us. He was quite restful, holding my wife's hand, and, as he was passing away, I spoke over him his own prayer 'God accept him! Christ receive him!' because I knew that he would have wished it. I give the medical bulletin published next day by Dr. Dabbs. 'The tendency to fatal syncope may be said to have really commenced about 10 A.M. on Wednesday, and on Thursday, October 6th, at 1.35 A.M., the great poet breathed his last. Nothing could have been more striking than the scene during the last few hours. On the bed a figure of breathing marble, flooded and bathed in the light of the full moon, streaming through the oriel window; his hand clasping the Shakespeare which he had asked for but recently, and which he had kept by him to the end; the moonlight, the majestic figure as he lay there, *drawing thicker breath*, irresistibly brought to our minds his own *Passing of Arthur*.'

“Some friends and servants came to see him. He looked very grand and peaceful with the deep furrows of thought almost smoothed away, and the old clergyman of Lugarshall stood by the bed with his hands raised and said, ‘Lord Tennyson, God has taken you, who made you a prince of men! Farewell!’”

Lord Tennyson was buried in Westminster Abbey on the 12th October, the pall-bearers being the Duke of Argyll, Lord Dufferin, Lord Selborne, Lord Rosebery, Mr. Jowett, Mr. Lecky, Mr. Froude, Lord Salisbury, Dr. Butler (Trinity College, Cambridge), the United States Minister, Sir James Paget, and Lord Kelvin. Two anthems were sung, one, *Crossing the Bar*, by Dr. Bridge, the other *Silent Voices*. He was laid next to Robert Browning, and in front of the Chaucer monument. Against the pillar near the grave has been placed Woolner’s well-known bust of the poet.

## CHAPTER X.

### LORD TENNYSON'S PLACE IN LITERATURE.

TENNYSON is one of the great melodious minds of the nineteenth century, whose category includes in its ranks Goethe, Beethoven, Heine, and Wagner, Victor Hugo and Verdi, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, who gave voice to their souls in poetry and music, the two articulate arts.

Tennyson's career as a poet closely resembles that of Pope. At a time when English poetry was being developed into a highly artificial form Pope came upon the scene and brought to perfection the method of poetic expression, then in the ascendant. It was the heroic couplet, not blank verse, which was the popular medium, and Pope became its master, discoursing of those subjects capable of best being dealt with in the couplet. The heroic couplet is by no means an easy measure in which to excel. The popular notion, often given expression to by nineteenth century critics, that blank verse is more difficult to write than the couplet, is a fallacy. Only a very few poets have attained to excellence in the couplet, many in blank verse. There is more room in blank verse for the re-adjustment of phrase when the writer has failed to express himself fully in

the first bound than in the couplet. Weakness of expression is more easily hidden in blank verse than in the couplet, the exigencies of which are very exacting. One of the great feats of the poetic guild is to write a long stretch of the couplet measure without any of those inversions not indigenous to our language, epithets placed after substantives, etc., which so frequently disfigure verse, and, when present in undue number, debase the native idiom. Verse, in fact, should be written in the same order of words as prose, and yet be melodious; and the rhymes should fall into each other like the blacksmith's tap on his anvil succeeding the blow on the metal, a harmonious echo, without its being apparent that the second line has been written for the sake of the first. Once you have a large number of couplets in a composition of which it may be said that the one line is "for sense and the other for rhyme," as *Hudibras* has put it, you set up a discordance between sense and sound too readily discernible by the reader. Pope (with a few others, of less magnitude) is the only poet who has written a great quantity of verse having all the excellencies without many of the faults of the heroic couplet measure. His antithesis, of which modern readers complain, was an idiosyncrasy of his age rather than one of his own characteristics, born of the Horatian modes of thought prevalent among the English Augustans. In Pope there are long stretches in which the power of expression, appropriate imagery, and the symmetrical evolution of the thought intended to be articulated are perfect. Reading him, one is

bound to conclude that the finish of his verse is the outcome of laborious self-culture. His "patient touches of unwearied art," in spite of the artificiality of his habit of thought, are the most satisfying of æsthetic delights. We feel that he had studied every phrase and turn of expression before giving his work to the public. His verse is like the chiselled work of the great masters of sculpture, clearly outlining the ideas to which he intended to give expression, with the marks of the chisel upon them.

Now, the work and career of Tennyson resemble the career and work of Pope, with a difference. Between Pope and Tennyson came Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, and Hartley Coleridge, and Tennyson wrought in blank verse instead of the couplet; and he brought to perfection all those devices in writing this measure which his immediate predecessors had adopted to give variety and sonority to their style, and at the same time escape from the latinised grandiosity of Milton, which was the bane of the eighteenth century blank verse exemplified in Young, Akenside, and even in Cowper. And herein lies his resemblance to Pope: he did for blank verse what Pope had done for the heroic couplet in bringing to perfection the polish of Waller, Buckingham, Dryden, Walsh, Addison, and Prior, his predecessors and contemporaries. Tennyson, too, in his earliest years wrote much verse in the couplet after Pope's style; his *Palace of Art*, as we have seen, was written in imitation of *The Temple of Fame*; his *Princess*, it has often been pointed out, is a mock

heroic somewhat resembling *The Rape of the Lock*. And lastly, Tennyson's style of writing blank verse became the popular model of all longish works in English poetry during the latter half of the nineteenth century, until, like Pope's couplets in the eighteenth century, people wearied of its "creamy smoothness" and monotony. What Cowper said of Pope, that he had

" Made Poetry a mere mechanic art,  
And every warbler had his tune by heart,"

we may also say of Tennyson's influence on the poetry of the latter half of the nineteenth century. It was the Nemesis that overtakes all excellence; and Tennyson commenced to be disparaged because his imitators were deluging the realms of literature with highly wrought Alexandrianism in imitation of him.

It was during this degeneration that the strong and masculine poetry but yet faulty verse of Browning came into favour; and Browning ever since, although he did not share in the sovereignty of fame of Tennyson during their joint lives, has had his audience; and many maintain that he is the greater luminary of the two. Browning perhaps glanced at the respective places Tennyson and he held towards each other in public estimation in his *Balustion's Adventure* and *Aristophane's Apology*. There the rivalry between the partisans of Sophocles and Euripides is brought forward as a subject of study for his countrymen, and the presentation of the conflict invites conjecture. But Browning with



his intricate metaphysics, his craggy style, his frequent lapses from melody, and his obscurity, cannot be preferred to the symmetrically expressed thought, the smooth verse, and the Virgilian music of Tennyson. Tennyson's tendency to opulence even is in his favour. The plebeian mind is fond of fine similes, systematically worked out. One of the most popular passages in poetry is the quadruple simile of Burns on happiness in *Tam o' Shanter*, a passage which the literary critic informs us is overloaded and transgresses the classical standard in style. And that slumberous apathy of verse which characterizes Neo-Romanticism, the winnowed vocabulary, that selection of the sumptuous word in which Coleridge, De Quincey, and Stevenson indulge, are equally popular with the people of taste. All these requisites of style Tennyson has harmoniously adjusted, and reached a perfection of form attained to only by the greatest poets.

I do not find much of Shelley in Tennyson, which is confirmed by the information given by Mr. Henry Graham Dakyns, the tutor of Tennyson's children, and well acquainted with Lord Tennyson's preferences in poetry (*Tennyson and his Friends*, p. 203). Pantheism for him was no solution of the problem of existence. To say that we are waves of the universal force that gather self-consciousness while we are alive on earth, and that we are drawn backward again or are absorbed in the universal force at death, merely implies that our existence here is the foamy agitation, beautiful it may be, of the billow that breaks and spreads on the strand. Such

a view of life does not satisfy the soul and explain the passion for perfection and sainthood; it is, after all, not profound, and lands us only in the vague, the intense inane, as Shelley himself called it. Shelley's poetry, with its ærial flights into mystic regions personifying the forces of nature and human nature as winged spirits and beautiful abstractions, goes beyond the horizon of humanity and commends itself only to a limited audience. Tennyson's poetry is the very opposite of all this. The views of *In Memoriam* are a direct antithesis to Shelley's scheme of belief. *The Higher Pantheism* was written perhaps to controvert it and inculcate the opposite doctrine of Immanence. Tennyson's creations, too, are the men and women, the girls and youths of the actual world. The hero of *Locksley Hall* is a modern reality. The gardener's daughter and the miller's daughter and Katie Willows are not idealised phantasms like the Witch of Atlas and the "Lady" of the garden of the *Sensitive Plant*. Maud is an English girl, clear cut as a cameo, and Dora and the May Queen are human characters, not the astral creations of Shelley's rarefied muse. Lady Clara Vere de Vere is a genuine woman, not an angel; King Arthur, Queen Guinevere, Lancelot, Elaine and Enid, Ænone and Ulysses have all the lineaments of a rich-blooded humanity.

Tennyson's style is not that of Shelley. He has more harmony and less melody in his verse. The harmony of verse consists of the regular beat of the syllables, alternately short and long; its melody is produced by occasional departures from the regular

beat, to preserve from monotony. During the eighteenth century harmony was in the ascendant, but it was Coleridge who re-introduced the billowy movement into English verse by the more frequent use of flying syllables than had been customary in the rigid diction of the eighteenth century poets. Flying syllables are those which, though pronounced, have only half the value of ordinary syllables in pronunciation:—

“ There she sees a damsel bright  
Drest in a silken robe of white  
That shadowy in the moonlight shone.”

Here the “a” in the second line and the last syllable of “shadowy” are flying syllables and add *melody* to the *harmony* of the verse. Read the following, too, from Wordsworth:—

“ The minstrels played their Christmas tune  
To-night beneath my cottage eaves ;  
While, smitten by a lofty moon,  
The *encircling* laurels, thick with leaves,  
Gave back a rich and dazzling sheen  
That *overpowered* their *natural* green.

“ Through hill and valley every breeze  
Had sunk to rest with folded wings ;  
Keen was the air, but could not freeze,  
Nor check, the music of the strings ;  
So stout and hardy was the band  
That scraped the chords with *strenuous* hand.”

Here the words “encircling,” “overpowered,” “natural,” and “strenuous” have each a flying syllable, which, employed in the build of the verse,

saves from the monotonous beat of the harmony. To assert that the poets of the eighteenth century did not know the value of these departures from the regulated short and long of verse would be to say what was not true, for both Pope and Gray employed flying syllables. Gray's

"Now fades the *glimmering* landscape on the sight,"

"Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,"

are instances that will occur to every one acquainted with the *Elegy*; and Pope's verse has many fine examples:—

"Order is Heaven's first law; and this confessed,  
Some are, and must be, greater than the rest,  
More rich, more wise; but who infers from hence  
That such are *happier*, shocks all common sense.  
Heaven to mankind *impartial* we confess,  
If all are equal in their happiness;  
But *mutual* wants this happiness increase;  
All Nature's *difference* keeps all Nature's peace."

But the eighteenth century versifiers made harmony predominate over melody; and it was Coleridge (and with him Wordsworth, although in a less degree) who re-established melody to its rightful place in English verse. *Christabel* is its apotheosis. Now, Shelley emphasized this billowy movement of verse far more strongly than Coleridge, and sometimes it is extremely difficult to scan his verse because of its immoderate use.

But Tennyson slowed down the lyrical impetuosity

of Shelley's verse,<sup>o</sup> and reverted to the music of Coleridge. Coleridge's

"They stood together chained in deep discourse"

is the Tennysonian note before Tennyson; and the habitual cadence of Tennyson's blank verse is not Shelley's, but rather a revulsion from the too frequent employment of flying syllables of the rhetorical poet of *Prometheus Unbound* to the more staid movement of the translator of *Wallenstein*.

Tennyson's most notable indebtedness to Shelley is heard in his early piece *The Poet*, reproducing the rhetorical clang of the *Ode to the West Wind* and one of its ideas, and breaking up the stanzas so that the thought of the one runs into the other. Tennyson has also some parts of *Adonais* in his mind when writing *In Memoriam* (*Life and Writings of Shelley*, p. 173, by William Sharp).

"He is made one with Nature," etc.,

is reproduced in *Elegy* 130,

"Thy voice is in the rolling air."

Shelley's versification is oftener defective because of the use of inverted epithets than Tennyson's. Tennyson is a more careful craftsman than Shelley.

Tennyson has often been compared with Keats, Theocritus, Claudian, and Virgil, but it is only in minor things that he can be likened to the first three. Keats, like Tennyson, is a close observer of nature, and writes in the sumptuous style in which Tennyson

sometimes luxuriates. The first part of *The Dying Swan*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, and *The Lotus Eaters* contain the most Keatsian touches of Tennyson. Theocritus was also an observer of nature, and drew his imagery at first hand, and wrote idylls. All this Tennyson also did, but his idylls are very different from those of the poet of Syracuse. Tennyson has been compared with Claudian, or rather with Coleridge's description of Claudian, by Professor Churton Collins. "Every line," says Coleridge of Claudian, "nay, every word, stops, looks you full in the face, and asks and begs for praise." (J. Churton Collins, *Introduction to The Princess*.) This is true as far as style is concerned, but Claudian is not a great enough poet with whom to compare Tennyson.

● When we come to compare Tennyson with Virgil, we have some basis of a real parallel, and Virgil, we feel, resembles in his career as well as in his poetry the career of Tennyson. Virgil is the writer of the first great epic of culture. Homer's *Iliad* is the pure, epic, and is simple and naïve in its style; there is no attempt to be learned. Its imagery, its similes are all drawn from shepherd or country life, and in its imagery we have the best picture of the Greece of the time of Homer anywhere. But Virgil in his day was the heir of all the ages, and utilised the works of all his predecessors in the domain of poetry in order to adorn his great epic. *The Æneid* is filled with echoes of antiquity, echoes of the phrases, expressions, images, and cadences of other poets. *The Æneid* is an epic of culture, and follows Homer in design, but not in execution.

In epic poetry there is nothing original of the first order after Virgil until we come to Ariosto, who perfected the epic method of the Italian improvisatore. He followed up the wildly irregular epic narratives of Pulchi's *Morgante* and Boyardo's *Orlando Innamorato*, and wrote in his playful vein about epic subjects, a vein which is indigenous to Italian improvisation. He carried all the characteristics of his predecessors to a high finish. The *Orlando Furioso* is one of the most wonderful triumphs of style. His plan is the wildest that could be conceived,—incident growing out of incident, digression out of digression, until it pleases the author to remind himself that he should finish narrating what he had left unfinished. Yet with all these irregularities Ariosto's poem is the most fascinating in epic literature, both for the symmetry with which the single episodes are evolved and the rich yet restrained style in which he describes. He closely resembles Tennyson when Tennyson wrote *The Princess*.

The next poet to develop the epic into a new form was Spenser, whose *Faëry Queen*, converting all the human virtues into allegorical figures, and making them fight like the knights of the chivalrous romances, was a development upon the method of Ariosto. Spenser selected, to be the sovereign of his fantastic world, the Arthur of romance, in whom was portrayed Magnanimity, the virtue that includes all the others. *The Faëry Queen* was so planned that each virtue, in extremity near the close of the book in which it is celebrated, was to be extricated by King Arthur, who came to the rescue just in time to save it from falling

into the hands of its enemies. This fanciful design was not carried out in its entirety, but what was written of it constitutes one of the most original epic romances.

Milton was the next to develop epic narrative; and although dallying at one time with the Arthurian legend as the best subject for an epic poet, he chose the more stupendous problem of the Fall of Man. This gave Milton an opportunity to roll off, like great billows of lingual music, that sublime sense of harmony behind all the evils in the world which pervaded his lonely soul and made him dwell apart, and sing in a grandiose style composed of echoes from all his predecessors well suited to his titanic subject. Like Virgil, he was a sedulous gleaner from the Greeks; but he has a cadence of his own in his verse well adapted to his lofty tone of thought, though not suited to non-Miltonic themes, and the employment of which led to the corruption of English in his imitators.

English blank verse had already regained its native idiomatic purity before Tennyson had commenced his *Idylls of the King*, and he himself had been one of the chief in effecting this reform. The English idyll is the most pure and melodious species of modern blank verse poem; and the idea of writing an epic in the form of a series of idylls or cameo pictures, each a little masterpiece of itself, and yet all hanging by idea together as parts of a great whole, was a most original and courageous enterprise. And this is what Tennyson did in composing his *Idylls of the King*, and this is his place among the poets of the world.



He is the fifth in succession to Virgil, Ariosto, Spenser, and Milton to develop epic poetry into a new form. At a time when the writing of epics ceased to be regarded as a possibility, he wrote one, new in design, fresh as the summer rose. Voltaire who had written a *Henriade*, Blackmore who had written a heroic epic on King Arthur, Southey who had written an epic on Joan of Arc, are dull as faded flowers; they had no new design. Tennyson alone saw the possibilities of the epic, and he will go down to posterity as the brother of Virgil and Ariosto, Spenser and Milton, one of the originators of the epic of culture. The only nineteenth century poet to be named alongside of him is Robert Hamerling; but I do not suppose the Germans claim that *Ahasver in Rom* is a development of the epic form.

In the Homeric age there was no difficulty in believing in the descent of the gods among men as depicted in the *Iliad*: and in Virgil's time the supernaturalism of Homer was acquiesced in. But with us, perusing those poets necessitates postulating a belief into which we cannot entirely enter. We read their works as specimens of bygone beliefs rather than actualities. The epic of Ariosto has the advantage over the *Iliad* and the *Æneid* in this respect. Though he employs the wild supernaturalism of the middle ages as a means of overcoming difficulties of plot, the light and sportive vein with which he writes reduces to a minimum the drafts upon our credulity in his supernaturalism. The same applies to Spenser, whose magic wonders we accept readily as playing into his allegorical scheme of thought, and his airy

hits at unbelievers in his fancies we know are to be taken in a contrary sense. The same, however, cannot be said of Milton; he loses our credence by carrying us into regions whither we cannot follow. Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* labours under none of the disadvantages that the great epics labour under, now that unbelief in their "machinery," as Pope, the poet of an artificial age, called it, has sapped, except in the case of Ariosto and Spenser, the foundations on which they are reared. With the exception of a few mystic touches here and there to indicate the idea of the infinite, the poet of the idylls makes no demands upon our credulity. The *Idylls of the King* is now almost the only serious epic which can be accepted entirely. The work is the last product of a form of intellectualism which is passing away in favour of drama and the modern novel, and Tennyson is its last poet.

This, I presume, is Tennyson's place in the history of English literature, and in the literature of the world.



## CHRONOLOGY OF CHIEF POEMS.

- 1827 "Poems by Two Brothers" published.
- 1828-29 The Lover's Tale.
- 1829 Timbuctoo.
- 1829-30 Mariana in the Moated Grange.  
 Supposed Confessions of a Second-rate Sensitive  
 Mind.  
 The Poet.  
 The Mystic.  
 The Dying Swan.  
 The Ballad of Oriana.
- 1830 "Poems, chiefly Lyrical," published.
- 1830-32 The Lady of Shallot.  
 Mariana in the South.  
 The Miller's Daughter.  
 Enone (first version).  
 The Palace of Art.  
 The May Queen (Part III. added 1842).  
 The Lotos Eaters.
- 1832 A Dream of Fair Women.  
 "You ask me why, tho' ill at ease."
- 1832-33 Poems, second volume, published.
- 1833 Tithonus (published 1860).  
 Ulysses.  
 The Gardener's Daughter.
- 1833-34 The Two Voices  
 "Of old sat Freedom on the heights."  
 "Love thou thy Land."

- 1835 Morte D'Arthur.  
Locksley Hall.  
The Day Dream.  
Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere.
- 1837 Sir Galahad.  
The Vision of Sin.
- 1842 Third volume of Poems published.
- 1833-46 In Memoriam.
- 1646-51 The Princess.
- 1852 Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington.
- 1853 The Daisy.
- 1854 The Charge of the Light Brigade.  
In the Valley of Caunteretz.  
The Higher Pantheism.
- 1854-55 Maud.
- 1856 The Marriage of Geraint ; Geraint and Enid.  
Merlin and Vivien.
- 1857-58 Guinevere.
- 1859 Lancelot and Elaine.  
First four "Idylls of the King" published.
- 1869 The "Holy Grail" volume published, containing  
The Coming of Arthur, The Holy Grail, Pelleas  
and Etarre, The Passing of Arthur.
- " The Last Tournament.
- 1871 The Last Tournament.
- 1872 Gareth and Lynette.
- 1875 Queen Mary.
- 1876-93 Becket.
- 1879 The Falcon.  
Rizpah.  
The Northern Cobbler.  
The Defence of Lucknow.  
The Voyage of Maeldune.  
De Profundis.
- 1880 Ballads and other Poems published.  
The Cup.
- 1882 The Promise of May.

- 1882    The Foresters.  
         Despair.  
         The Charge of the Heavy Brigade.
- 1884    Freedom.
- 1885    Vastness.  
         The Ancient Sage.  
         Balin and Balan.  
         Locksley Hall Sixty Years After.
- 1887    Demeter and Persephone.
- 1889    Merlin and the Gleam.  
         The Death of CEnone.  
         Crossing the Bar, December 1889.
- 1891    Akbar's Dream.  
         The Dawn.  
         The Making of Man.  
         Mechanophilus.



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